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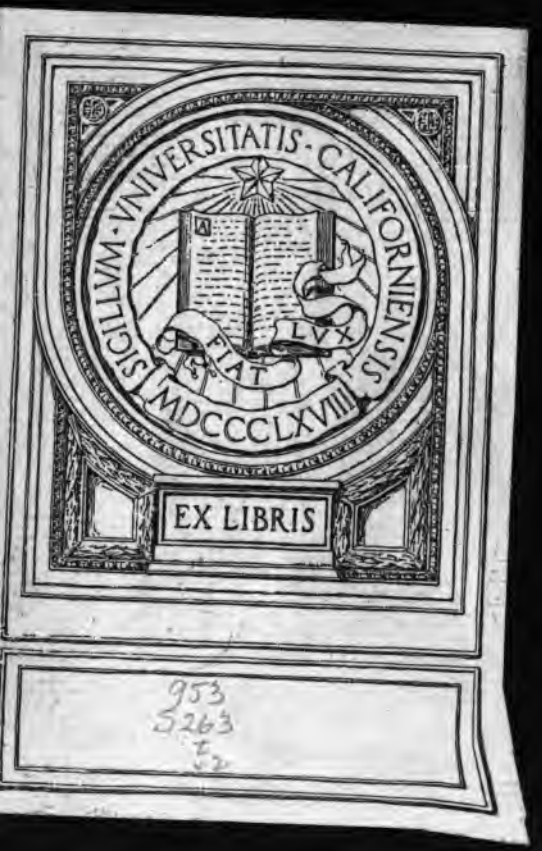

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THE TRAGEDY OF ISRAEL.

PART II. KING DAVID.

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THE

TRAGEDY OF ISRAEL.

BY

GEORGE FRANCIS SAVAGE-ARMSTRONG,

M.A., D.LIT.

KING DAVID.

A NEW EDITION.

"Ein guter Mensch in seinem dunkeln Drange
Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewusst."

GOETHE.

LONDON
LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK: 15 EAST 16th STREET
1892.

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The hand falls wearily that did essay
With little skill in clear marmorial form
The Dark Soul's mighty agonies to shape;
And the vast vision which my life uplifted
Beyond itself in sympathetic thought,
Parts from me like a curl of summer cloud,
Drifts, and is gone; and, starting, I behold
Rome's stubborn majesty and mask of mind,—
Colossal glories,—*here!* . . Ah, what am I,
To mould amid Art's empire, or to dare
To sing of great deeds where the great have sung?
My heart swoons in me. Yet will I arise,
And, with hope humbled, back into my breast
Draw the fair purpose, labouring to the end.
O, sweet the toil, O, sweet as to the birds
Building in April! Even as the birds,
Love-driven, I build; and, what though rough the craft,
Joyous I build; and do not the wild doves
Around the Colosseum make their nests,
The swallows in the domes of Angelo?

TERME DI CARACALLA, ROME,
June, 1872.

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PERSONS.

DAVID.
NATHAN.
GAD.
AMNON.
ABSALOM.
ADONIJAH.
SHEPHATIAH.
ITHREAM.
SOLOMON.
ABIATHAR.
ZADOK.
JOAB.
ABISHAI.
AMASA.
BENAIAH.
URIAH.
AHITOPHEL.
HUSHAI.
JONADAB.
CHENANIAH.
ITTAI.
BARZILLAI.
SHOBI.
JONATHAN.
AHIMAAZ.
SHIMEI.
MEPHIBOSHETH.
CHIMHAM.
CUSHI.

LOKMAN.
ZIBA.
MIBZAR.

MICHAL.
BATHSHEBA.
TAMAR.

A Youth.
A Benjamite Chief.
An Old Man.
A Gileadite.
Chiefs of Israel.
Chiefs of Judah.
Prophets.
Priests.
Levites.
Counsellors.
Captains.
Warriors.
Old Men.
Young Men.
Women.
Israelites.
Men of Benjamin.
Gileadites.
Peasants.
Messengers.
Attendants.

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THE TRAGEDY OF ISRAEL.

PART II. KING DAVID.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *Night. Near Hebron. The Tomb of* ABNER. NATHAN, *sitting alone, rouses himself from meditation, and speaks.*

NATHAN.

PAST midnight now! With what swift, silent wheels
Westward thou movest, white and wasted moon,
And you, ye pulsing stars, that one by one
Dip through the olives on the lonely hills!
There o'er the mountain evening's golden bands
Belted the heaven, when my languid foot
Paused in the valley. . . Wherefore didst Thou lead

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Hither my wandering limbs, and hold'st me here,
O Father, through the void and voiceless night,
Without or word, or sign, or helping hand?
For, though I wait Thy coming patiently
Through the night-watches, or at eve, or dawn,
And waste the spirit's obdurate walls away,
That it Thy voice may hear or see Thy brows,
Still tarriest Thou far off; and I in dark
Dwell ever, and with sad uncertain heart
Roam like the lonely winds about the world.
O useless life! I trusted that these hands
Would grow as mighty, moving with Thy will,
As his—my master, Samuel, whom Thy death
Now muffles from my cries, Samuel, my lord—
Whose mandate ever surges on the air,
"Watch thou the Chosen, till a day shall come
When thou shalt guide him:" and it hath not come;
But evermore he lifts his sovran arms
Higher, and climbs above the ways of men—
King David, driven onward with desire
Of beauty, and the wild delight of life.
And more upon his lips and on his palms

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Thou sheddest of Thy favour than e'er yet
On seer or prophet, more (by O what bounds !)
Than on Thy servant, who in ways of nought
Here stumbleth. For he draweth all Thy light—
Prophet, and Priest, and King—that we, Thy sons,
Of ancient right and privilege despoiled,
Hang pale as nor'ward clusters of the vine,
And are as nothing. But alas ! e'en here,
This cold still sepulchre that holds my heart
So, fancy-dazed, to brood through aimless hours,
Stands witness, in the mid core of his realm,
That to be King makes not obedience sure—
(For by a rebel hand thou diedst, Abner !)
And in the scents and warmth of his fair spring
About my lips cold airs of death I feel
Blowing from far,—sad presage of long woes
Born with his goodly sovereignty, and fed
With that which makes him greatest, and doth make
To-day us glorious, lifting Israel
Among all peoples high as hope hath winged.
For so within the little fruitful seed
Is folded seed of death,—the branch, the flower,

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The rust, and the decay; and in the womb
Life's stealthy poison brews within the blood.
And therefore in his great aspiring hours—
King peerless—and this noon of Israel's glory,
Of which he is the royal dazing sun,
Rejoicing, ever doth the band of fear
About my heart, lone in the midmost throng,
Wind winterly, and grief like guilt waylay . . .
But hark the low breath of the dying night
That makes a wandering music in the woods ! . . .
Farewell to thee, thou silent sepulchre !
Farewell the old sweet hopes that in thee die !
Dawn in the East, and o'er Jerusalem
Streams in the day of Israel's utmost strength.

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SCENE II. *The Slopes of Mount Zion.*

DAVID; LEVITES, *bearing the Ark;* CHENANIAH; ABIATHAR; PRIESTS; GAD; PROPHETS; *the* KING'S SONS; COUNSELLORS; CAPTAINS; WARRIORS; *a Multitude of the* PEOPLE *following, with music and dances.*

DAVID.

STILL on with steadfast tread.
Bow low the reverent head.
The Lord your God is in your midst to-day:
Lo, earth-engirdling light,
He liveth in your sight!
Here shall His House be reared, to rest alway,
And on this Mount our might its fast foundations lay.

GAD AND PROPHETS.

Who shall murmur now though nights be dark,
Trustless of dawn?
Who shall wail though autumn woods be stark,
Bird-seasons gone?
Who shall fold the hands and call death sweet,

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Weighed on with pain?
Swifter than the sunrise are His feet,
Dear as the rain.
And though tempest thwart us, death and dearth
Nightly devour;
Though the plough be frozen in the earth,
Fled leaf, and flower;
Though the grasses wither, and the leas
Be burnt and dry;
Though the heart be broken, and the knees
Fail, He is nigh.

ABIATHAR AND PRIESTS.

Like one stricken with a fell disease,
Friendless, alone;
Like the leper in his agonies,
Made we our moan.
Him the low lute music, nor the light
Flowers of the field,
Dawn, nor stars in cluster in cool night,
Solace may yield:
Old delights have left him, and the years

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Yawn, and his brain
Wrestles with their brood of griefs and fears,
Battling in vain:
Only of their darkness will days past
Bear back in thought,
Bitter truths that break, the dreams that blast,
Nightly new-brought:
Bitter is the wine in every bowl,
Bitter as clay:
Hope is faint within him, and his soul
Green in decay.
Even as his was our long woe that now is swept away.

DAVID.

Ye cannot rob the winter of his pines,
Or show the cypress yellow: with His hand
He fed our little strength, as with sweet wines
The fainting lips are moistened: while the Land
Seemed torn from us, and great was our despair,
He fashionëd His purpose in long care.
And now, and now, the glory which in trance
We visioned crowning Israel's weary brows,

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Is yours! O, yours the fair inheritance
Of fruitful realms, whereof in desert lone,
Driven from his rest, the Prophet Moses dreamed,
Who, smit with love of that green solitude,
And battling for the People's utmost good,
God-guided in the mind's quick motion, schemed
And wrought, until the tower of Israel's fame,
Rock-rooted, grows above the level earth,
Lifting its fair walls upward like a flame.

CHENANIAH AND MANY OF THE PEOPLE.

He, with might of mind and will,
Travailing in his night of pain,
Wrought the plan, and with deft finger
Fashioned it without a stain.
With his passion he did fill
Languid hearts that fain would linger
In their bondage and despair;
Gave our Fathers eyes to see,
O'er the barren waste of years,
All the plenteous years to be;
Till they rose as if his heart

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Throbbed in every resolute breast,
Following in a storm of fears,
Where they knew not, only trusting
Him that through the darkness prest.

OLD MEN.

He beheld, but not for him
Fruit of promise; not for them
In the flying autumn's fleetness
To partake the red grape's sweetness,
Or to drink the rills that run
Laughing down from Lebanon.
Alas, alas, for them that in dry places,
Journeying through ways of fire,
Lifting to fierce Heaven their languid faces,
Suffered the pangs of unfulfilled desire,
That we their children, nourished with their toil,
Might gladden us with conquest's kindly spoil,
Might spread our tents in grasses deep and sweet,
And feed our flocks in shaded valleys green;
Might feel the dawn-dew cool about our feet,
Plant on the hills our olive-gardens grey,

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And underneath the vine-tree's leafy screen
Lurk from the sun, or, where white lilies sway,
Hear in the waving palms the winds at random play!
Alas, alas, for him whose dying eyes,
Straining from Pisgah, saw the purple waves
Of Judah's mountains rolling in their golden skies,
And, stretching his faint arms in awful love
To clasp that Land of rest for which he strove,
Sank in vain flight, and died, as the struck eagle
dies!

PROPHETS.

But weep not for the dead, or wail.
Behold, our children live, whose lives are blest.
And surely now thy long long grief shall fail,
O Israel, and all thy heart have rest!

DAVID.

O, seated firm on thine imperial hill,
And girdled with the might of Javeh's arms,
Thou shalt keep back the heathen's wild array,
As breaks the shore the sea in his rebellious storms;
And, girt from hurt and alien ill,

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Thine inward strength shall not decay,
But, growing, as thy years fulfil
Thy promise and thy foes decline,
Compact in system, skilled in hand,
Self-harmonized in thought and will
And action, loyal to the law divine,
Hence, where this Home of God I rear shall stand,
As throbs the sun of heaven with core of light,
Driving sweet life, sweet strength, through every land,
Shall beat thy strong free heart, filling the world with might.

WOMEN.

The praise to thee, the praise to thee,
O King of the kings of the earth,
Who swayest the Land with mirth
As the wind in the woodland sings;
Who hast made us strong as the sea
Storm-swept with the winter's wings:
At the coming in of thy feet
Thou hast borne us delight as the dawn,

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Life fresh as with dew, and a pleasure as sweet
As the honeys of Lebanon.
O, the burthen of pain is gone
As a mist in eyes of the day;
For our foes are scattered, their right hand shattered,
Their pride down-fallen, their valour away.

MEN.

O, at thy shadow they fled from thee.
They arose as a swarm of seabirds rise
That feed on the shores of the sunset sea,
With clangour of wing, and shriek, and wail;
They have gone as a cloud goes down the skies.
We abide, and they dwindle; we grow, and they fail.

WOMEN.

Thou hast cast over Moab thy net, for a spoil
Over Edom and Moab; the gates of the East
Thou hast torn from the socket; with fat of the toil
Of our foes is the wealth of our winepress increased.

MEN.

The wild man of Amalek left his black tent;
In the green pasture he left his flock feeding.

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Zobah has fled, as a rain he is spent,
At the breath of thy lips, at the wind of thy speeding.

WOMEN.

The heart of the Philistine faileth for fear;
From the rock of his pride by thy strength is he hurled;
Ammon shall strive but a day with thy spear,
O champion of Israel, arm of the world!

MEN.

Toward the Great River palms thy valour impelled thee;
To their leaves thou hast shaken the light of thy sword;
Yea, the people that dwell with the dawn have beheld thee,
The eyes of the Morning awoke at thy word.

ALL THE PEOPLE.

Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands! . .

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DAVID.

Peace! . . Not that name whereof ye sing is great . .
Thou on whose breath I am borne as the weak bird
Drifts on the wind—O Thou who through all things,
As through the thick boughs of the trees the sky,
Everywhere shinest, soft ethereal light,
Wherein this earth floats, as on blue, sweet seas;
Who, in the mystic woof of Thy vast worlds
Weaving, hast thrown the thread of my poor life
Thus for a wonder in their sight, my life,
Which is not, O Eternal, save in Thine—
Let them beholding, rest not here their gaze,
But follow the long shadow of Thy hand,
Until they feel upon their blinded eyes,
As I have felt, Thy glory, as the sun.
I have gone forth to Thee, I have gone forth,
From morning, following wheresoe'er Thy voice
Seemed calling from the mountains and the sea.
The longing and the passion of my breast
Drave me; the vision of the fruitful years
Fades, shines and fades, feeding mine eager heart
With fierce and incommunicable love.

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Never deed done, and never splendour sought,
But in obedience to the inner word
Or outer, Thine inviolable decrees.
Therefore I deem that whatsoe'er is wrought,
Or shall be, through these weak unworthy arms,
Yea, though it lead me through long pain, or seem
An evil thing, shall alway, at the last,
Bear gifts of glory and Thy name exalt,
Still furthering the ripening of Thy world.
Lift me upon the wave of Thy wide sea,
O God! O, bear me up the baffling shore
Whereon I strive, or e'er the hands drop down
Thou madest strong, that, though thus high I stand,
My Israel may own an ampler sway! . .
On, on with hearts of love,
On, crying as we move—
Cry unto Him who here with us shall dwell,
That o'er all lands thy name
Triumphant He proclaim
Until the heathen fall as Edom fell,
And to His rod the realms bow down, O Israel!

[*The whole multitude passes onward.*

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SCENE III. *Jerusalem. In the House of* AMNON.

AMNON *and* JONADAB.

JONADAB.

THY sister Tamar is thy sister—so.
Our father Abel did his sister love,
The righteous Abel, whom his brother slew.

AMNON.

Save *he* had loved his father's wife none else
Found he for joy.

JONADAB.

Thy father hath had wives
Too many for the safety of his sons.
She that is born not of thy mother's womb
Is scarce thy sister, Amnon. Who shall blame
Or thee or her if, with so slight a stay
Of natural prohibition, ye, whose lips
Never the self-same sustenant bosom fed.

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Whose faces grew not to each other's eyes
Through daily commune cold, or kisses sweetless,
Should, meeting at the kindling time of love,
Bend each to each a fierce and eager flame?
The King himself hath laid for thee this pit.
And, if thou lovest, need'st not fear or fail:
Strongest of arm is gentlest oft of heart,
And never gentler in his moods the King
To yield to soft entreaties. Mark me, Amnon:
Strong though the King, might not a king's great heart
Beat with a weary motion sad and slow,
Weighed on with some occult and heavy grief?
What lives to chafe the King? Nought, nought. And yet
In the mid light and splendour of our triumph
He bears a mystic shadow on his brow.
Hast thou beheld it? Hast thou dreamed it? no:
But Heaven hath cursed me with a keener eye.
Did not I find *thy* heart's hid leprosy?
May I a king's? Didst note him in the throng,
But late, when up the Mount the People moved

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Rejoicing, how he hung a weary head,
And when they sang his glory, with what doubt
He lifted up his face, and what sad eyes?
I thought the cry he sent into the void
Seemed born of a despair that made their praise
Bitter as mockery.

AMNON.

I thought not so,
When, loosing from the neck his royal robes,
He stood forth girded humbly as a priest,
And danced before the women and his God.

JONADAB.

I, sorrowing with that sorrow, did revere
His deep heart's ecstasy: I am not great,
Nor pure, God wot, nor holy; but the King
I as a god adore. The King is sick—
Alas that I should say it!—He will yield.
Demand. Fear not.

AMNON.

The King I little fear.
Yet might I fitly: he hath vengeful arms.

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JONADAB.

Nay, rather fear thy brother Absalom,
Who loves this Tamar as a brother may,
Being indeed her brother.

AMNON.

Absalom
I reck not while this rage is in my soul.

JONADAB.

Thou need'st fear no man if thou fearest not these.

AMNON.

Her whom I love I fear.

JONADAB.

O, then, indeed
Thine is a caitiff's love: ay, and thy brows
Tell thou couldst hate her did she love not thee.
Friend, there are loves of more ethereal flight,
Breathe freer air, look further out of self,
Will rather inly suffer woe on woe
Than for their soothing work the lightest wound;

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Live rather for the hearts beloved than them
Wherein they dwell, yet are to him who loves
Strong as the falcon's wing to bear his life
Above this fleshly world. Men have there been
Who through the potent magic of such loves
Have lifted kingdoms. Some there be whose souls,
Without sweet love sustaining, droop and fall
In proud ambition's war, who, let the lips
But taste the dear life-giving draught again,
Arise with tenfold valour in their breasts . . .

AMNON.

Why thrum this vatic thunder in mine ear?

JONADAB.

To tell thee true love by its fruit is known;
And true love comes but once in many a day,
But when it comes is mightier than the seas;
Yea, and though many times a man may love
Unsatisfied, yet if his soul be large,
Late he may reach the love supreme that makes
Or breaks him, the last home, whence no return;
And that thou art not made for loves like these:

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Nay, by those hungry eyes and heavy lips,
Amnon, thou art not.

AMNON.

Never rail at me.
How knowest *thou* the loves whereof thou singest?
Thou gilded clay!

JONADAB.

As the black wether knows
The white ewe, seeing she is not as he.

AMNON.

Go to, then! Help my soul to this sweet feast.
Thou hast a crafty brain, and eyes more clear
Than mine are, compassed with no cloud of love,
Blinding them. Help. O, bring her to my breast!
Let me behold anew the dove's eyes mild,
And slake my heart's long fever. Let mine arms
Clasp the dear neck I die to kiss, my hands
Feel the sweet warmth of her white fingers smooth,
And from her lips my lips draw living wine.
See my worn cheeks, are they not seamed with pain?

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My flesh with wakeful longing wastes away.
O save me from this hunger, lest I die!

JONADAB.

My heart is tenderer than my conscience is.
I will in pity straightway to the King,
And crave this bliss. Lie thou upon thy bed;
Be vexed to-day with divers nameless pains;
The King shall hear, and pitying thee, will ask
What comfort can the treasures of his house
Yield thee, his eldest born; and I shall say,
One simple jewel set within thy sight
Will be as was the serpent lifted up
To them the serpent stung. That jewel, Tamar,
Thy sister, shall he send thee. If I fail,
Cut off my better arm. Content thee. Come.

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SCENE IV. *Jerusalem. A Chamber in the* KING'S *Palace.* DAVID *alone.*

DAVID.

FROM the far heights of pride's exultancy
To passionless cold flats, how sure the fall!
O, as the lark drops songless out of heaven,
So the wild hour of joy is gone—my heart
Feels the dry clods again. And yet the pain,
The lone despair, is born not of a day:
Rather the hope is rootless, that strikes firm.
If the unlawful love that dogs my soul
Should pass—O Bathsheba, if the dear face
I covet other visions veiled away,
Old valour and lost hope might here revive . . .
Hope with love's hurt revive? A foolish dream,
Unless the will o'erthrew it: for the will
Grows strong with victory, and multiplies
Triumph by triumph. But the will is weak

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If passionless, and vain is war with love.
The rent heart knows not strength. And what
am I
If will and passion arm not for one end?
I who have done all deeds at passion's hest!
If this dark love had healthful liberty,
Might I prevail? How can my life prevail
If I ensample show of virtue's frailty
To those I should uplift above all ill?
I grapple with the guardian of my soul,
Wish maketh war on wish, and love on love,
And the rocked vessel breaks. Life-wrecking mad-
ness,
Reliefless, incommunicable pain! . .

AHITOPHEL *approaches, making obeisance.*

Yea, do thine office. Speak.

AHITOPHEL.

Joy to the realm!
From Rabbah goodly tidings, O my King!
Thy servant Joab compasses the city
On every side as with a net, and waits
But as the fisher to draw home his spoil.

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DAVID.

'Tis well . . [*Musing.*] The inspiration of my dawn
Enlivens other breasts, and that is done
Which should be. Ammon falls: *their* world is
bare . . . [*Turns to* AHITOPHEL.
Entreat the Princess Michal to attend me . . .
[*Alone.*] Let love's self be the antidote of love . . .
So much attained, so much to be achieved:
And I, that through the sweet eventful years
Felt like the wind-borne sailor, hour on hour,
Light-hearted, toward the wished port impelled,
Lie listless on a dull unrippled sea,
Behold, with blunted eye and will a-drowse,
Isle beyond isle, for which my heart of old
Hungered, and have no power to seize the good
I coveted, no, nor desire to seize:
But, lulled in pulseless and unmanful sloth,
With dumb dissatisfaction vext, and pricks
Of self-contempt that eats the heart of pride,
And weary pride that offers stalëd flattery
To a mind jaded with its glut of praise,
I droop amid the splendour of my years,

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And, ere the blossom of sweet youth be fallen,
Drink the dull draught of age. Whom need these arms
Contend with? Where are they, the runners vain,
That thought to outstrip me? Backward in my speed
I turned my face, and deemed their eager feet
Pressed me at heel—I tread a lonely world,
Lone moving out of voice and sight of men.
My friends, my rivals, ye who called me little,
Young blossom overblown; who smiled upon me,
Exulting in your pitiful self-conceit;
Who said my deeds were nothing in your eyes,
Matched with the deeds ye dreamed of—"Thus the great
Would do, and thus;" and when I thus *had* done,
Declared "the great," your idols, were not great,
Until ye knew not what was great or small;
Then foamed in maniac fury, beat your breasts,
Spat filth upon my fame, plotted my hurt,
Threw boughs across my path in moonless nights,
And closer wound your bonds of amity,
From common hate dear reconcilements drew,

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Embraced, pledged faith, stroked one another's
cheeks,
And mutual solace drunk in mutual praise,—
Where are ye now? —Vain men and impotent!
What cruel whirlwind caught you, friends, away?—
Vain, mean, and little souls! I scarce recall
The hate that sneered upon me from their eyes,
The smile of triumph upon idiot faces
That tempted the indignant hand to smite.
What need to strain in lone, companionless,
Profitless strife with visionary foes?
So dies the fervour that makes great deeds done.
Praise of my people yields no impulse more,
So puny seem their hearts, their reasons mean:
No, nor disdain of foes, for none is nigh
Whose scorn could shame me into rivalry.
If over boundless fields I spread mine arm,
Who shall admire? Or with great kings contend—
If great be left to dare—who stand aloof
As arbiter? Before whose reverend eyes,
And for whose love henceforward shall I strive?
Whose passionate ambition to my heart
Draw, to revive the slumbering fire within? . .

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MICHAL *approaches.*

O Michal, come thou near me with the wafts
Of youth about thee! One half of my realm,
Knowest thou, I would yield to any foe
For one hour of that hope which thy first smile
Swept through my soul so many years ago,
That I that half might win again, and after,
One half of the wide earth?

MICHAL.

Indeed, my lord!

DAVID.

Indeed and very sooth.

MICHAL.

I marvel much
So slight a thing's remembered of a king.

DAVID.

The least thing as the greatest oft prevails,
And oft the little yields the larger boon.
We are so strangely, subtly fashioned,
A grain of dust may deaden all our powers,

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A drop of dew may right us yet again.
And *thy* love, Michal, was no little thing.

MICHAL.

Doubtless my love was less than dust or dew
To one who would be King of Israel.

DAVID.

Michal, thy love was the first ledge whereon
I rested, scaling to these icy peaks
Attaining which I sicken and grow sere
In the dread loneliness of majesty.
Give me to taste the olden ecstasies,
Tasting the dear renewal of that love.

MICHAL.

I was the daughter of a king, and gave
My love unto a beggar. Cursed is she
Who stoops in loving from her true estate.

DAVID.

Nay, to what end is this?

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MICHAL.

It matters not,—
I did not *seek* to break my lord's repose. [*Going.*

DAVID.

If thou hast any wrong, cause of complaint,
Speak; and I pray thee let it be straight out.
I love not hints, and dim suggestions,
And snake-like twists of speech; and I am weary.
Speak: I will grant thee, wife, thy whole desire.

MICHAL.

Nay, I have none—seek nought. I have not fallen
So low in mine own pride—not yet—that I
Should beg of thee a boon at such an hour.

DAVID.

At such an hour? Nay, then, at such an hour,
When all the sinews of my being fail,
And such a weight upon my bosom drags,
And such cords bind me in a deadly sleep,
That I can lift not hand, or set my will
To do the thing which saveth as from death,

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Help *me.* Sit by, and of life's morning tell,
That with remindful music of thy voice,
And faces thronging back of friend and foe,—
Old rivalries, old visions, old delights
Become a thing of now—arise in me
The valour of my youth, and I prevail
To burst the bonds of this strange lethargy,
And work the vast remainder of my dream.

MICHAL.

I cannot love my lord's imaginings.

DAVID.

Alas, methought thou didst upon a time,
Michal! . . But no, there was but one true heart
That ever beat with mine in all the world;
And that is not . . . O, O for one short hour
Of commune with thy spirit, Jonathan,
That I might tell thee how the breasts of kings
Can find not life sufficient in themselves! . .
Hast thou not any word for comfort, Michal?

MICHAL.

Ask comfort of the women in the way

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Who sang before thee, solacing with praise
Thy proud heart over-drunk with jubilee,
When thou didst late go up to Zion hill,
Rejoicing with the lewdest of thy slaves . . .
Yea, I have fallen—I a princess born !
I say, it ill befits a people's king
To make his people sport, in beggar-wise
Dancing before the women in the way . . .

DAVID.

Ugh ! ugh ! thy heart is meaner than a beast's,
And thou art lither in thy poisonous hate
Than tongues of serpents. Out upon thy lusts,
That dye the whole world in thy troubled sight
Thy heart's lascivious red ! What, is thy flesh
Angered, and all thy crampt uncleanly soul
Stung with a passionate jealousy of thy kind,
Because a right deed to thy heated brain
Suggests a filthy dream ? Worse than a harlot
Art thou in this thy peeping modesty.

MICHAL.

Rail on. Redouble my dread injury

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In manly wise, breaking my woman's heart
With shame on shame. Ay, thou hast made me strong!
Spurn—fleer on me! Ay, thou hast made me hard!

DAVID.

God! how censorious chastity achieves
More fleshly glut than honest sin herself,
Finding with her innumerable eyes
Food everywhere, to hunger and to feed!
The beasts run naked in the eye of day,
Yet are more chaste and seemly, heart and dream,
Than women such as thou. Know, thou poor soul,
I dwell above thy narrow fields of life
High as the sun of heaven above thy brows,
See as thou canst not see, hold commune proud
With voices subtler than thine ear can hear,
Feel with another body, and obey
A vaster law—Thou canst not understand?
Leave me. Go, suckle in thy filthiness
With their own milk thy loathsome brood of dreams,

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And leave me, with my lonely pain, alone.

MICHAL.

Ay—then, do to him, God, as he to me,
And make more desolate his heart than this
That dies in me! Break down, break down his
pride! [*Goes out.*

DAVID.

Alone?—ay, verily, and thrice alone,
On these far heights of thought and sovereignty,
Dissevered from my kind . . . ay, lone as thou,
Unhappy King whose wrested sceptre lies,
With thy soul's curse upon it, in this hand
That fails in very plenitude of sway . . .
Fails in mid flight of triumph! what! fail now! . .
Yet, O this nature's war with nature's self,
And love's hurt deadening every faculty!
And O this agony of languor, this
Lifting of faint, unmanageable arms,
To grasp for but one hour my life's lost dream!
Well, I will seek the child's heart yet again,
Amid the flowers and leaves, the winds and birds.

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SCENE V. *Jerusalem. At the Doors of the* KING'S *Palace, leading to the* KING'S *Garden.*

JONADAB.

HERE will he pass anon, if yonder meek
Sleek underling with perpendicular arms
And concave spine and sanctimonious mouth
Spake truth for toll-traverse, and they that skulk
In palaces may learn the ways of kings:
And here will I abide for him in hope.
And 't is a questionable service, mine.
Well, let me dare it bravely. Lo, the King! . .

DAVID *steps from the Palace.*

Lost in strange reveries, depressed and sad:
A favourable mood . . . My King, and lord! . .
(Nay, he will heed not!) . . O my lord, and King!

DAVID (*passing onward*).

Save thee, good friend!

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JONADAB.

My King, my King, despise not thou thy slave.

DAVID (*recognising him*).

Nay, *cousin?*

JONADAB.

Ever gracious, pardon me.
I come a suppliant to my lord the King:
Yet not for any favour to myself,
Save as a favour to another done
Enriches me.

DAVID.

Say on.

JONADAB.

I will be brief.
Amnon, the King's son, lieth sorely sick—
A sickness of the mind that wastes the flesh;
And—as fantastic longings vex the weak
(Sick men and children) and an idle toy
Flatters a feverish brain—his tortured soul
Strives, longing for a face to bend above him,

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And for a dear hand to make cool his brows.
Would the King grant his prayer? A little thing.
Even that his sister Tamar might go down,
And with the temperate music of her mind,
Her words of peace, and sweet persuasive eyes,
His sick heart heal.

DAVID.

Is this my Amnon's will?
It is a sweet and brotherly desire.
Yea, let the damsel tend my well-beloved.

[*Passes on.*

JONADAB.

Thy love hath healed me also . . . Thus we draw
The darling treasure from the sleeper's hand,
Treading about him daintily. That a dog
Such as I am should thus bejape the King!
O noble King, that o'er our utmost dream
Soarest, what strong mysterious agony
Stops thy fair flight, hurts thine imperial wing?
And none but I the drooping head regard,
And the proud heart's despair!—I of his slaves

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All but the nearest, worthless as the worst!
And what if that which I have done this hour
Bring hurt to him, and to the kingdom hurt!
Rashly demanded, heedlessly bestowed!
Light words, light deeds, outthrown, go down the wind,
And their inevitable harvest bear.
I have done that which I can ne'er redeem.
O, I repent me! . . . good soul, dost repent?
Rest thee at peace. Ill multiplies on ill,
Though righteous men strive contrary—nay, oft
From Virtue's own heart branch the evil growths
Thick as the jungle thorn. May I revoke
Man's doom? Shall I for shadow of a good
Life's little pleasures lose? No. What am I
More than my breed, that I might minister
Nought to the world's unconquerable woe?
The ill that must be, by some arm shall be:
As well mine as another's. Come the end!
I watch unmoved, and to my friend athirst
The deadly dear delight bring gaily home.

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SCENE VI. *Jerusalem. Near the* KING'S *Palace.*

A grove of olive-trees.

BATHSHEBA *wandering alone.*

BATHSHEBA.

I WANDERED dreaming by the cypress-shafts
That hedge his garden. Wherefore did my feet
Draw me so near? There the anemones,
There the blue violets grew. I stoopt in joy,
Gathering handfuls. Then I heard his foot
Treading the tumbled cones. I rose—I rose,
But my limbs failed me, and I strove as one
Held by the mocking phantom of the night.
He turned to me a moment, and his eyes
Dreamed on my face, and drowsed me like a spell.
Then like a tower brave by earthquake rocked,
From shoulder down to ankle his strong frame
Shuddered as though he grappled with great grief;
And, lifting up his face to heaven, he pressed
His palms across his brow, and passed away . . . .

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Better that thou hadst slain me at a breath;
Better that thou hadst trampled me to clay . . .
Beat back, beat back, O Javeh, this dread love
That floods my being like a ruining sea! . .
My heart breaks in me. He, the King, the King,
The chosen of the Land, the heart, brain, arm
Of Israel, the sun before whose beams
The goodliest warriors, poets, prophets, kings
Droop like sick herbs in summer's fire! And I!—
Poor, lowly, base, a girl in years, a fool
In knowledge—O great Heaven, to lift mine eyes
From his shoe-latchet, from the dust he spurns! . .
I love him. I shall perish for his love.
O weary doom of woman, whose deep love
May find no utterance,—nay, though it slay her,
Yet must she go down silent to her grave.
A dog might love him, did he spare to lash it
Out of his path . . . but O, this misery
Is not the love that pity breeds! O, blind me,
That I may sin not, seeing him, but die,
Die famished in my longing! O God, God,
Abate mine agony, and my sin subdue! [*Passes.*

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SCENE VII. *Jerusalem. In the* KING'S *Garden.*

DAVID *alone, sitting under a knot of pines.*

DAVID.

WINE of dear love, true love, O sovran draught
That doth make youth heroic, and weak men
Strong as the morning and the life of gods!
O the delicious love in her great eyes
That peeped between the lashes when her head
Hung back with smiles for joy of me! My soul
Takes life in me; the sap of the young spring
Drenches my limbs with dew. I am light as air,
And feel the glad sweet world at every pore.
Soft as the twinkling night-fly flits, her eyes,
Love-luminous, with swift unwitting glance
Have rendered me her soul. Now to contend
Were doubly deadly, for a twofold love
Strives with my will. I can no more contend.
Why push aside the medicinal cup,

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And murmur for a help that is at hand?
Better fulfil the soul's supreme desires,
Contented with the utmost sequent ill,
Than, scarring its free growths in wrathful hate,

ABSALOM *approaches.*

Make barren all its field.

. . . What! Absalom?

ABSALOM.

My lord, . .

DAVID.

Thou comest much unmannerly,
Being unsummoned of thy king.

ABSALOM.

I come
Unto a father.

DAVID.

Thou unruly boy,
Is not *thy* father to the last thy *king?*

ABSALOM.

I have read a gentler law.

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DAVID.

And so thou hast,
And thou dost ever read the scroll awry . . .
Thou beautiful, ungovernable thing,
Thy beauty is thy pardon. Speak, and pass.

ABSALOM.

If the King slumbered in his tent, and slid
A serpent in, might not a meaner slave
Venture anear, to kill, without command?

DAVID.

What stealthy darkness creeps upon the King?

ABSALOM.

And danger in the darkness!—Yesternoon
There came to me a band of hungry men,
Lean, miserable, clad in grimy rags,
Clamouring about my doors, a piteous throng.
I bade my servants drive them like foul dogs
Back to their midday dens. Some stood, some fled
And then came crawling near again. But one

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Strode boldly out, and with uplifted hand
Drew mine eyes towards him, speaking ominous words.
It was a tale of wrongs and tyranny,
Of sorrow, and of pain, of laws misdealt,
And thereto following dire poverty,
Starvation, sickness, heartless punishments,
The ills that love depose, and are as dung
To fat the roots of crime. And when he spake,
The rest tumultuous with responsive throat
Yelled their accord, till with the last wild word
Arose a general cry, like hungry beasts
Barred from their flesh; and some with knarry fists
Threatened remembered foes, and some like hounds
Showed their set teeth agrin, and high in air
Flashed the drawn knife and whirred the knotted club,
And in they rolled upon me like a sea.

DAVID.

To what end am I burthened with this tale?

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ABSALOM.

Hear. Waving them to stillness, I commanded
That they should name specific acts of wrong,
And not with empty babble waste the day;
Let three, whose woes were symbols of the rest,
Stand forth and speak. Then heaved they in the midst,
And, billowing to and fro, the tortured mass
Outvomited three forms before my feet.
Never such various faces have I seen.
An Edomite the first—a heart of fire.
He with loud voice proclaimed his nation's griefs,—
How some are driven from their fields, to find
Help from the hospitable alien; some,
Whose generous spirits had with violent wrath
Assailed the imposëd law, have drunk grim death,
Or pine in servile bonds; the remnant few,
Staggering beneath the yoke that irks them, live
Poor pitiable lives—a nation tamed,
Whose smouldering hate spits smoke at every vent.
"Loosen the bond," he cried, "and set us free!
O thou who dwellest at the Victor's foot,
Be thou our help, and plead against his sway!"

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DAVID.

Hounds! How I know them! I would hang such men
As high as are the topmost poplar leaves
That wink against the sky. Frown not at me,
Nor wave no threatening arm, audacious boy.
Canst not discern—nay, for thy heart's but green—
That 'tis of these spring rife the discontents
That double their own pain, impotent rage,
Rabid rebellion, impulse masterless,
And all that rots a people's pride to clay?
For these are they that turn the foolish crowd
From honest toil that nurtures honest pride,
Tear the old wounds and time's sweet healing mar,
Feed idle souls with visionary hope,
Crown vice the riotous mistress of good lives,
Arming the malcontent, declare the law
That stands for God parent of ill self-wrought,
And for the natural pains that are of God
Curse the arm regnant. These are they whose mouths
Defile the snowy names of good, right, love,

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Patriot aspirance, justice, brotherhood,
Their hands upon the scrip of them that heed;
Draw fools afield, and when the danger springs,
Betray them for nine shekels to their foes.
Wouldst make them loyal to their kings? Reward
Their hostile babble with their kings' own gold!
I pray thee vex me not with words of these.

ABSALOM.

Nay, for thou dost that generous man deep wrong;
His looks spake for his soul . . . hear me, my father!
The second—O what hatred in that face!—
The second closer came. He lifted up
His hairy arms, and cursed the prosperous men
That eat the labour of poor hands, and give
No favour back; and cursed the pitiless judge
That smites with heavy sword the erring lives
Misery makes reckless. Then they raised a cry
Fiercer than ever beat on tyrant's ear,
Till I cried with them, stung with kindred rage.
Then the third spake—a youth of rolling eyes,
And passionate, swift gesture; and his words

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Shook me with sorrow; for *he* told of hopes
Blasted, and dear ambition lashed to death;
And how fair deeds go by unhonoured,
And how the young heart beats against its chain:
And as he spake, meseemed the ruder crowd
Scarce understood him; but *I* understood,
And loved him. There, before the sight of all,
I drew him to my heart, and, unashamed,
Kissed his flushed face with tears.

DAVID.

And then the herd
Yelled round thee, crying, Absalom the Good!

ABSALOM.

Thou sayest.

DAVID.

Get thee back unto the teats
That fed thy toothless gums, thou wayward babe!
Doth the King sleep? And thou wouldst break his
sleep

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To babble of the buzzing of a midge!
The waters have their slime. Their pains, their
pains!
Breath are their pains, matched with the major good.
But for the general weal thou art; so they;
So I that rule; and if I more than these
Prosper—and I a cup far deadlier drain—
I prosper that, uplifting mine own self,
I bear the weight of Israel as I rise.
I make my yoke as easy as I may;
But for this clamorous and rebellious brood
That thwarts the paths of rulers, reasonless,
Let none have pity. Leave me, and grow humble.

ABSALOM.

This is the iron voice of tyranny
That doth make poor men mad.

DAVID.

Hence, to thy home!
Thou art too wise in thine own self-conceit
E'er to learn wisdom.

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ABSALOM.

Am I, then, a child?—
Let them that would believe me but a child
Assail.

DAVID.

Thy words are but as empty winds
That beat against a girdling city-wall.

ABSALOM.

Aha! let be, let be. I say, let be.
Let the King look to it! A man might rouse
Such fierce unhappy souls to deeds as strange
As might make tremble even thy firm hand.
Let the King look to it! These are the fires
That, kindled, burn a kingdom's heart away.
Let the King look to it, nor by brute scorn
Add one more rebel to the dangerous throng.
Let the King look to it! Never hast thou given
My spirit room, but in a prison-house
Keepest me bound. Which one of all my brethren
Hast thou not favoured with an ampler boon?
Then, look to it, look to it, look to it, I say! [*Goes.*

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DAVID.

Too fretful heart, how often shall I chide,
Or soothe, or threaten, or with gentle hands
Draw thee to me, yet never thy wild pulse
Allay! . . A chill foreboding visits me . . .
But no, 't is but a sickness of the brain.
Still shalt thou find my breast thy truest home;
Thy worst word shall not sever thee from me.—
. . . I thought my days were dry as desert sands,
And never more my fancy or my heart
Could yield or branch or flower; but even now
The green and rosy splendour of the spring
Clothes life afresh—and in a little hour!
'T was but a glance, a lifting of the lids,
A moment's beam of love; yet where were then
My heart's despondence and the impotent will?
Back fell the curtains of my night, and lo,
The curled clouds in silvery ripples ran
Down the steep shores of heaven—there were my stars,
My worlds, my infinite regions of free air! . .
O, I have sought *thee* through the long, strange years,

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Thee, feeling blindly on from good to good,
Ever deceived, not to be satiated
Of any love save this: for thee I panted,
Believing that thou wast—as man believes
God is, whom eyes behold not—though unfound;
Ay, taking every idol for thy truth,
And oft in dim doubt wavering, and at last—
As one long voyaging droops in despair
And drowses, till in some delightful dawn
Heave the blue hills above the weary wave,
And he awakes, and sees—in a dull sleep
I am drifted to thy feet. Dear visioned face,
Beauty beyond all beauty of heart, eye, mind!
And thine, too, is the sympathetic soul
That takes and gives the glory of the world.
I will no longer hurt thy life and mine.
If a king war upon himself, his realm
Splits from the cope. . . Well were it, wise, or good?
Is it well? It is a sweet restorative—
O keener than the breath of the cool sea
O'er Carmel borne, blent with the myrtle spice,
Rosemary and pine and aromatic bay,

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To the sun-sickened labourer in his field.
Wise? Good? There is no deed a man may dare
That scapes the flecks of folly and of ill.
Measure the harvest and the seed:—there death,
Here life—here Nature whole within herself,
Here music of my being without grate.
And, with this harmony of mind and sense,
What splendours shall mine arm not work once more,
That now hangs limp! Aught deadlier cannot be
Than that corruption and decay of will,
Though sins invade as thick as the sea sand
By Ascalon or Gaza . . Doth not he,
Her Hittite lord, my slave, at Rabbah fight?—
A little nearer to my hand, Uriah!
My mandate thou shalt bide . . . Come the free
heart!
Let the glad torrents leap the baffling ridge,
And with what fruitful majesty they roll
On eager to their sea!—Away with fears!
Already doth the old abundant blood
Back from its bonds through my swooned senses steal,
And hands and knees are restless in their strength.

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ACT II.

SCENE I. *The Camp of the* ISRAELITES *before Rabbah.*

JOAB, AMASA, BENAIAH, URIAH,
CAPTAINS.

AMASA.

GLORY for glory: choose! . . nay, thou hast chosen:
Rest thee content. This honour from the King
Is double honour, for the King's enfolds
The Kingdom's.

URIAH.

Nay, the glory, friends, is yours,

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Remaining on the glorious fields of war,
Where valour, nobler far than civic craft,
Sees death more rich reward than praise of kings.

BENAIAH.

Yet surely hath the King well honoured thee,
To draw thee, trusting, to his counsels, home.

URIAH.

Till Rabbah is my King's my home is here—
Here would I swink, here lavish my poor blood,
Here wounds were sweeter, fronting yon high walls,
Than sleep in bloodless, calm Jerusalem.
O give me, God, the soldier's proper crown!
No sluggard's prize, no civic wreath for me!

JOAB.

Tell thou the King, the fight goes fairly on,
Hard labour for hard hands, and happy I
To whom 't is fallen. Happier the King,
On whom fair honours do so thickly lie
He needs not grudge his servant this renown.

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AMASA.

The last: for what remains when Rabbah falls?
What city unsubdued?

URIAH.

The last! ay, sooth.
Then, good-bye, honour; rust, thou honest sword . . .
If I return not, think of me as one
Dead out of time—no sluggard, friends, but dead.
Farewell!

ALL.

Farewell, good friend! farewell, brave soldier!

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SCENE II. *Jerusalem. A Room in the* KING'S *Palace.*

DAVID *rapidly leads in* BATHSHEBA.

DAVID.

AT last . . . speak now : draw back thy veil,
and speak :
Draw back thy veil that I may drink the day . . .
My glory and my pain !

BATHSHEBA (*unveiling her face*).

O, I am faint,
And my feet fail me. Whither have they led me ?
Forgive me, O my God !

DAVID.

Speak, speak to *me.*
Lift up thy face : open thy great warm eyes :
Let my soul feed upon thy beauty.

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BATHSHEBA.

Ah,
Hide me in darkness, cover me with clouds,
Lest I die seeing thee!

DAVID.

Live, as I live,
Strong as a god with this deep draught of love.
My lips draw life from thee, my heart a fire
That tingles from the touch of thy dear hands.

BATHSHEBA.

How have I dared to come with them? . . Mine eyes
Are blinded with the sun: my soul is sick
Even unto death! . . O, O, that I should love
thee!

DAVID.

Cleave to me with thine arms, thy lips, thy soul:
Here press thy bosom to my beating breast;
Loose all thy love about me! . . How thy life
Flutters in thee, like some poor wounded bird
Struck to the ground! Fear not: I am a king.

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BATHSHEBA.

O, let me home to die! . . Nay, call them back
Who bore me hither; send me hence away,
And bid them slay me for my sinful love.

DAVID.

Bid them to slay me rather—me who live,
And am more potent in my sway this hour,
One-sworded, than the leaguëd kings of earth! . .
O thine eyes' wonder! Lift the heavy fringe . . .
I drift away in their great deeps, and feel
The cool sweet heavens about me. Kiss my lips.
Draw me to earth again, lest I may doubt
Thou art not, and this joy is but a dream.

BATHSHEBA.

Yea, thou dost dream, and terrible is thy love;
For thou art as a god, to make and love,
Mantling the world with thine own glory. . . God,
Be merciful! . .

DAVID (*rapt*).

When I was yet a child

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I loved all beauty. All the livelong day
The sky, the woods, the meadows were a joy.
Before my limbs were firm, in the sweet herbs
Nestling, or kneeling on the mountain-rock,
The tiny many-footed beasts and flies,
Blue-winged, or sheathed in emeraldine mail
Or suits and shards of scarlet, black, or gold,
Were mute companions of my loneliness,
Their beauty and their mystery were my food;
The little fruits and flowerets, thick as dust,
Tasselling the grasses, netted me with love;
Then, O the mountains, O the domes of blue
That drew me toward them with still promises
Of splendours hidden in the veiled world;
Then the dear faces with their gentle brows,
That beamed upon my boyhood; set my soul
Searching, with longing eyes unsatisfied,
The richer beauty unseen. From dream to dream,
From face to face, I have passed, from heart to heart,
An-hungered, drawing just a little might
To do high deeds, a moment, then once more

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Searching the one unfound ineffable
Splendour, to make my soul for ever blest,
Making complete my life. I shall not seek
Again, for ever.

BATHSHEBA.

Whither hath thy soul
Soared from me, O my lord, and toward what world
Dost thou uplift thy face with such sad eyes?

DAVID (*still musing*).

Still the white peaks, and still the heaven beyond,
And inaccessible and viewless realms,
And heights without a name! and if I climb,
What end? and where the quiet of the heart,
Ambition's balm? where perfect empery,
The slumber of old pride, the satiate soul?
If I return? . . For me is no return,
For the fierce thirst goads onward, and the years
Heap labour upon labour, and the deed
Done is but father of the deed to do,
And every triumph widens that deep gulf
Which doth divide me from the world, and make

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Friends as a ghostly dream, and commune strange
A fantasy, and life a lonely pain!
What boots it if I beat the heathen home,
And fold the mountains in my wield, and fire
The heart of Israel with a hope renewed,
If new desire but grow of new success,
Dream beyond dream, and in the midst of glory
Discomfited I sit: and, now elate,
Now humbled, chafe; and from the praise of men
Suck mine own shame, and feed my self-contempt;
Or worse, if with desire of sovereignty
I lack the power or impulse to attain?
. . . Cleave to me fast, thou darling: thou shalt be,
Even thou, with thy sweet love and sympathy,
Thy beauty, and the wonder of thine eyes,
And thy mind's dear and sure tranquillity,
O more than arms, or gold, or stubborn hosts
Numberless, to make firm my conquering arm,
And strong my palms to clasp the servile world . .

BATHSHEBA.

My love? . . O cast me from thee, now, this hour.

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Seek me no more. *My* love! . . O merciful,
Merciful God! . . my love will drag thee down,
Divine one, to that earth which thou shouldst spurn.
Release me, and forgive me . . . and farewell! . .

DAVID.

Thou shalt not leave me. Wouldst thou slay my
soul?
Thou art more to me than wine to swooning lips,
More than the rains to dry and withered fields;
Thou hast rolled the burthen of long years away;
Here beats that heart of David which of old
Throbbed as a god's, and drave heroic warmth
Through conquering legions. . . Look forth on the
city:
Behold its towers upreared, its strong white walls
Fresh from the quarry's ribs, the mason's chisel,
Its streets a-throng with busy hurrying men,
The camels, and the mules: the din of voices
Comes like the roar of pinewoods in the wind:
Lo, there a troop of warriors marching down
To their diurnal rounds: there go the merchants

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Who brave the deserts—bound for Egypt they,
Or fields Chaldean, or the ports of Tyre:
Here by the gates come in the waggons piled,
The Lebanonian branches for my roofs,
Or for my towers the rock . . . It is the city
Of David, mine, the centre of the land,
The heart of Israel. In my day's dawn
It glittered on its mountain from afar,
Dazzling mine eyes. I said, I will be King,
And on the hill of Zion set my throne.
Lo, I *am* King of Israel, and my towers
Stand in Jerusalem. Never Hebrew arm
Hath done as mine.

BATHSHEBA.

And never arm shall do
As thine hath done, God's chosen, sacred King.

DAVID.

O, this is little: for my soul's desire
Is boundless as the sea, and my heart's hopes
Limitless lands engirdle. Lift thy heart

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With mine, and follow my thought's flight that soars
High as an eagle, to embrace the world.
Yonder stands Moab's purple mountain-wall;
And yonder Gilead; northward Lebanon
Towers white above the flaky cedar-bowers;
West is the sea, with Zidon on its coast,
Whence sail the wandering ships in perilous ways;
Southward old Egypt, and the desert peaks
Of Sinai, and the realms of rock and sun.
Soar higher. See beyond wild Moab's hills
Lands billowing to the verges of the world:
There Tigris from the snowy mountain bears
Life to the plains: there the Great River runs
With many a fruitful winding to the sea . .
There will I lay my hand, and there, and there,
There plant my cities, making Israel
Tower over Egypt. What yet have I done?

BATHSHEBA.

Joy, joy, ineffable glory! I behold,
And all my soul goes forth with thine. My mind
Drinks in thy thought, and I am as a spirit

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New-born in other worlds. King, I am strong
This hour—thy strength, thy fire is in my veins.
On, on to thy vast deeds! Despair no more!
Behold, hereafter shall the utmost ends
Of earth declare thy splendour, and thy name
Shall be the music of the songs of men!
Arise, arise! O that I were the buckler
Upon thine arm! O that I were the sword
Swung by thy hand! I see the kings of earth
Bow down to thee! I hear from east and west
Thronging the multitudinous strange tribes! . .
On to thy glory! Doubt not ever more!

DAVID.

Then, O the bloodless fields! . . Cleave close to me!
Didst thou but know how useless hangs my life
In the drear hours wherein I doubt thy love,
Thine eyes being hidden from me, how my hand
Lies dead upon the hilt, and never song
My lips may shape, nor have I heart to rule,
I well believe, so gentle is thy soul,
No woman-fear could rob me of that help
Which thy love lends me in my lonely war.

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The world is servant to mine eye, it bends
Quailing before my brows: did any slave
My weakness dream, my realm would heave and break
As the wave breaks in foam: *their* fool contempt
Would leave me worse than fool. *Thou* knowest all,
And yet I feel no shame; thou makest strong
My weaker arm—an hundred times more strong
Than in the mid spring of my fiery youth.
O say that thou wilt love me to the end!

BATHSHEBA.

I will be near thee till my darkest hour;
I will obey thine every word and glance;
I will re-fashion my whole life for thee;
I will think thy thoughts only, feel thy bliss,
Thy sorrows only; love the things thou lovest;
Hope with thy hope; believe with thy beliefs;
See with thine eyes; hear with thine ears; forsake
Friends, kindred; break all bonds; forget all vows;
Fear nothing; care for nothing save thy weal;
Cleave to thee, love thee, lose myself in thee:
Thou art my soul, my life, my heaven, my god!

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SCENE III. *Jerusalem. In the House of* ABSALOM.

ABSALOM *and* TAMAR.

TAMAR.

IT is the King's wish.

ABSALOM.

Ay, the King, the King!
If in the midst of thought or merriment
A man more bold or subtle than his tribe
Beg favour of a king, importunate,
And the king nod assent for weariness,
In royal fancies folded, lo! a law,
A mandate that may ruin half the world!
My father's judgment slept, or stood aloof,
When thus his royal and oblivious lip
Yielded compliance. And, methinketh, Tamar,
It sleeps too often, or it stands aloof
Too often, when this Amnon begs a boon.

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TAMAR.

O, but 'tis well. For is he not the elder,
Firstborn and dear, the hope of all the People?

ABSALOM.

Firstborn and base-born, and it is not well
The doubly royal should not from the King
Draw half the favour. And it is not well
That thou, the daughter of a tribe of kings,
Shouldst wait upon this peasant for his ease.
Ay, ay, the King, the King!

TAMAR.

Peace, gentle brother;
It is his will.

ABSALOM.

What if the King were blind,
Or mad—like him he warred upon of old,
Saul, for whose sorrowful and lonely doom
I have mourned with strange involuntary tears?—
Should I, with clear strong eyes, and reason firm,
Obey to the realm's hurt and mine own woe,

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Because he *were* the King? Or if a father,
Down-stricken with a mumbling idiocy,
Muttered fool-counsel to a son alert,
Why should the son do folly in the land
For slavish reverence of fatherhood?
The King, to hush the buzzing of a voice
That drave his mind from happier thought, hath
said it.
I set my will against the King's in this,
And say, go not.

TAMAR.

But what if mine own heart
Pace with the King's?

ABSALOM.

Then art thou blind as night;
And greater need that I should thee restrain.

TAMAR.

Nay, Absalom, thy heart doth give thee eyes
That forge the ills they frown at. Out, alas!

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If thou hast cause to murmur at the doom
That sets thee lower on the Kingdom's heights
Than thy wild thought and venturous soul would
soar,
Why with fantastic griefs and fictive wrong
Make doubly dark thy days? The King is wise
Above all wisdom, and his lavish love
Stints not for thee. His wisdom tempers love.
Gentle his hand on thine impetuous breast.
To me 'tis sweeter to obey than strive.
And lo the fruit! A father's will fulfilled,
A brother holpen in his agony,
A sister's duty done, a woman's life
Put to its true and honourable use,
And Absalom's forebodings flown how far!
Nay, brother, lift thine eyes above the cloud.

ABSALOM.

Ay, take thou too their side. I shall not have
One heart to love me, or one arm to help . . .
Well, I am strong, and I will hold my road.
Farewell!

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TAMAR.

Nay, gentle brother, not in wrath.

ABSALOM.

Rest thee content, fair sister, and farewell! [*Goes.*

TAMAR.

Farewell, dear brother! Rest thee too content!

[*Goes.*

SCENE IV. *Jerusalem. A Room in the* KING'S *Palace.*

DAVID *enters, followed by* LOKMAN.

DAVID.

THE Philistine shall hold not Judah's hills,
Nor he my life . . . [*To* LOKMAN] Speed me
Uriah hither . . . [LOKMAN *goes.*
Not here this quell—Help, Joab, from thy tents

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By Rabbah. Let him drink the soldier's doom.
There foremost in the battle shall he wend,
And take the gifts of war. . .

URIAH *enters.*

I know thee valiant,
Uriah: often when my Gibborim
Fought round me in the midmost whirl of war,
I have seen thy sword plunge in the serried swarm,
Dividing rank from rank as wave from wave
The hurrying prow divides, or thy strong frame
Stand like a gate against embattled foes.
Methinks for thee war were a welcome feast,
And this dull ease, with how much honour worn,
Honour well meant, as was the earning well,
Hangs like a sickness on thy vigorous limbs,
While Joab fights for Rabbah, and my hosts
Stand open-mouthed for fortune's gifts and praise.

URIAH.

The soldier's unused hand grows quickly faint,
As rusts his unused sword.

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DAVID.

Thou shalt return
To Rabbah. Bear this letter to thy Chief.
[*Gives him a letter.*

URIAH.

Twofold thou makest me to love thy name :
Though I go hence to death, yet am I blest,
Death being thy gift, my King. [*Going.*

DAVID (*musing*).

Yea, hence to death:
And he must die. And for a warrior,
Who is half beast, however dutiful,
Loving, or bold, how better die than thus?
Yet had he shrunk, or spoken abject words,
I had not known this pang that pricks me now,
This refluent wave of pity. . . [*To* URIAH.] Turn
thee, soldier.
If I should hold thee still within my walls,
To see thy fellows march again from war
Triumphant, and thy chance of glory gone,
Would this or death be dearer?

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URIAH.

To submit
Were dear, for dear to me is to obey:
But well, my King, thou knowest how the heart
That once hath tasted triumph evermore
Thirsts for the opportunity of glory,
And how it irks the strong imprisoned soul
To look forth from its windows, and behold
Deeds done that it had outdone being free.

DAVID.

But death?

URIAH.

Let me die bravely when I die,
And I will take farewell of this great world
With scarce regret.

DAVID.

So hast thou said, and well.
But is thy life so stinted, that to die
Leaves earth no spoil? When thou hast turned thy
face

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Toward the tents and chariots, comes there ever
Thought of dear friend, or homely dream, to freeze
Thy heart with icy palms of memory?
O, when I march forth from the city-gates,
With hearts that pulse together, and firm feet
Chiming in glad accord, my soul is merry
As one who feels the air of upland realms
And hears the thunder of the mountain winds
Roaring around his ears—How feelest thou?

URIAH.

As mountain rivulets glad and free . . yet . .

DAVID.

Ha? . .

Nay, then?

URIAH.

. . The still hours of the night may bring
Thoughts that make faint my brain, and are the founts
Of childish tears. For one there is, O King,
Awaits my coming in a lonely home,

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Who doubleth life and glory—such a wife
As might exalt a king—wise, gentle, meek,
Beautiful as the springtime, whose great love
Makes half my might of heart, and half the valour
That thou hast deemed not nothing, O my King! . .
Nay, what a pouting coward fool am I!
Thy gentleness hath left me less than man.

DAVID.

Give me the letter that I bade thee bear.
Choose as thou wilt.

URIAH (*returning the letter*).

I have chosen, gracious King. [*Goes.*

DAVID.

Shall it end thus? Hold, God, my heaving heart
Lest I die . . . Ah! . . . Or let me sink asleep,
And feel no more the changes of the world,
Here on this royal couch that cannot ease
The King's head evermore; and when they come,
Let them behold the brow they feared, white, cold,

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Passionless in hard death. Ah, let this love
Be my life's last, I dying ere it die:
Let me die loving her, die of her love—
My peerless perfect queen! . . To have tasted this
Joy beyond joy, and then to cast it from me! . .
Belovëd, hear my voice across the night,
Calling to thee; stretch forth thy hands and touch,
Thrilling the missive air; press fast thy lips . .
I kiss thee, kiss thee, kiss thee! Let me die
With this dear agony! . . Gone! and all might
Of will and arm clean dead! . . Earth, take thy blooms
Back to thy bosom: let the wilderness
Compass me with grey stones and barren sands;
Turn, wine, to water; and my bread once more
Be ashes and dried grass: the thriftless wort
Be empress of my yards, and sow the fields
With riotous children: hide, thou star of hope;
Fade out, thou narrow band of golden heaven
That lit the dull horizon of my days:
I have attained mine utmost, and to-morrow
Go down the shadowy gulfs! . . Sweet face, farewell!

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Farewell thine eyes' dear wisdom, and the smile
That made me more than king! Slow from my
mind
Will pass thy memory—for all things fade—
And I shall scarce recall thy voice's music
In the far years, in my long lethargy;
And with thee will my spirit's noblest part
Drop likewise, bit by bit, as planetree boles
Yield the split bark, but not, as they, renew.
Worse than the body's death is love's decay:
For with it fail the mind's fair purposes,
Belief in love, the sympathetic soul,
Hope and ambition, and the joy of the earth,
And all that lifts a man to lift the world.
I shall go down, an old man impotent,
Amid my minions' laughter, to the grave . . .
Ha! *I?* . . A moment since my soul was strong
As the many-sworded sun in his uprising,
Remembering thee . . . What shall it profit him
If the King starve for that which ignorantly
He holds, an idle treasure? If the small
Suffer, their ill but falls upon themselves,

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But if the great, 't is ruin measureless,
Hurting the world. My gain is Israel's;
His is his own. A little deed of wrong
Oft doth the great good following well outweigh.
And he, his hands are strong, valiant his heart,
But of such vulgar stuff as mothers breed
On every hillside hourly. If he die,
Little his loss, for little is his mind,
Little his pleasure; and the world's loss nothing:
Forth to his place steps out as strong a man,
To rival his best deed. But one hour's pain
Of the mind to me, on whom a kingdom rests,
Might be a kingdom's end. Why, if we twain
Lay wounded on the field, he, though he died,
Should yield his water-cup to cool my lips,
Lest with the King's death failed the fight itself.
Shall he not yield me this? . . 'T was conscience forced
My words that made reveal his love, and leave
Conscience so keen. . . Why should I covet that
Which is not mine? . . Thou art his wife, his love—
The beggar's, not the King's. Thou wilt forget
My love in dull submission to thy lord,

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Array thyself to flatter his faint eye,
Wind thy smooth arms about his bison-neck,
Smile thy dear love-smile in his face, cling close,
And kiss, and call him thy belovëd . . ah
Merciful Light! with his hard heavy hands
He will embrace her, he will feed his soul
On the ripe little lips that clung to mine,
He will stoop down, and feel the warm white breast
Heaving against him . . . no, by the throne of God,
Not though I wreck ten kingdoms from their base
To keep her mine! . . Approach! . .

LOKMAN *enters.*

Take thou this letter,
And give it to the swiftest-footed slave
Of all my house—on—on—send to Uriah,
Command him bear it to my captain Joab:
If in his house he tarry, let him rise
Straightway and go; if he be gone, pursue—
Yea, let the runner pause not though the sun
Bite to the bone! [LOKMAN *goes.*] On, sluggard, to thy hest! [*Following rapidly.*

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SCENE V. *Jerusalem. An open space before the House of* ABSALOM.

TAMAR *enters distractedly, as in flight: then suddenly pauses.*

TAMAR.

PITILESS God, wilt Thou not strike me dead?
Shall my poor hands uplifted, and my heart
Crying to Thee, not move Thee to unloose
Thy livid lightnings over me, and burn
To dust this loathly burthen? . . . Take, foul earth,
These tresses, fouler from his fingers' touch
Than from the worm the dead; take all I loved
Of mine own beauty; for my handmaidens
Praised, and my sisters hated me. I'll trample
All these, and these, thus, in thy hot white dust
Abominable: give me of thy pestilent scruff,
That I may make my loathly head one grey
And nameless horror. Burn, make ebon-black
My face, O sun; eat, eat into the bone,
Suck all the bloom away that paints this rank

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Incestuous body harlot's white and red;
Make mine eyes fire, as of one drunk with wine;
Singe to the lids these lashes . . . Amnon, Amnon,
Amnon, may never woman comfort thee,
Never thy body yield thee fruit of love,
Nor child be born to gladden thy dark home!
May thy desire cling to thee like thy flesh,
And all men mock thee in thy lonely lusts,
And women jeer at thee! For thou wert cruel
In thy brute hunger, and crafty in thy love;
Subtle thou wert and heartless, hard and cruel,
Beast-like thou wert, O Amnon, and a slave!
May thy God curse thee with an equal shame! . .
Aha! aha!
Thou hungry earth, take all! These are my robes,
Meet for King David's daughter . . . none of all
His children were as we, Absalom, Tamar,
Born of the self-same mother royally . . .
Take robe and sleeve, and mingle them with rags
Of beggars and the slough of lazar-sores.

ISRAELITES, *and* MIBZAR, *the Edomite, approach cautiously, talking to one another, and pointing.*

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I will go down among the evil women,
And eat and drink with them, and I will say,
"Aha! my sisters!" . . . Off, ye glittering gauds!
[*Tearing away her earrings and armlets.*

OLD MEN (*turning away*).

Nay, nay.
Peradventure 't is one of the women
That lie in wait at the gates,—
Foul heaps of rags and rottenness,
Cast over-used from the world,
Mad with wine and desire,
Who care not whither their feet lead,
Nor among whom they reveal
Their ruin and shame.
Trouble her not.

TAMAR.

Take all, take all that fed my maiden pride;
Make perfect the swift wreck of my lost life.

YOUNG MEN (*coming nearer*).

Hist! Tarry a little, friends,

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Till we have heard her words.
If it be one of the lewd women,
Drunken with wine of the night,
And strayed overlate into morn,
She will make us sport for an hour.
But see ye her jewels and robes?
She is none of the filthier brood,—
A poisonous blossom of costlier kind—
A rich man's concubine,
Rent with a jealous rage
That some one sweeter than she
Hath gone to his amorous arms.

TAMAR.

Tear out mine eyes, and throw them to the dogs,
Lest they make more men mad! . . I looked not on him
With any love like *that!* . . O cruel, cruel!
O unjust Heaven! O miscreated world!

OLD MEN.

Ay, ay,

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Surely ye well surmise.
For look ye, her delicate hands,
And the rubies she hath cast
Far in the dust, and her robes
Silken and rare!—Alas, alas,
It is a young sweet face!
Come nigh, and behold.

TAMAR (*turning to the Crowd*).

I am the King's daughter, she whom Maacah,
Princess of Geshur, bore him in his house,
Absalom's sister. Do ye wonder at me,
And think it strange a daughter of the King
Should stand for hire at noonday in the streets?
Do ye not know that we are women all?
(*To an* OLD MAN.) What think you of this hand?

OLD MAN.

A fair one, lady.

TAMAR.

Is it not so? A little dimpled hand! [*Kissing it.*

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Here is my arm . . . nay, do not fear me . . look!
Is it not smooth and rounded delicately?
Nay, a man's fingers could not span it here.
Is it not well?

OLD MAN.

Alack, 'tis very fair!

TAMAR.

Well, there is more beside. My hair is golden;
See you the way it falls . . thus . . . to the knee!
My lips are like the budded pomegranates,
Gentle and blue mine eyes—so said the King,
My father, with his palm across my brow,
And loved me . . . so my sisters hated me,
Because there was not one of all our house
That was not brown or dusk; and that is why
They plotted for my ruin, and have brought me
To this great shame.

OLD MAN.

Lady, alas, what shame?

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TAMAR.

Nay, then, *indeed* ye do not understand?
Who could believe it? But the King's amiss.
For, look you, if my father had not slept,
This evil had not fallen on his house.
Therefore, the King's amiss.

ISRAELITES (*to one another*).

These are the fierce delirious words
Of one who has suffered a deadly wrong,
Forerunners of madness. Listen again!
Did we not say it was something strange?
Was it not well to await?

TAMAR.

Hast thou a sister?
Look not upon her face if she be fair.
Let not your wives breed daughters any more . . .
Come! to the King! . . . Stay, stay, ye have not heard.
How can I tell you how it all befel? . . .

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'T was done at the King's bidding . . . O my God,
Be pitiful, and take me hence away !

[*Covering her face.*

OLD MEN.

Away, away ! Have ye no shame or pity ?
It is not good to spy upon this grief.

MIBZAR.

Nay, but hear all : there 's something here ill done
Concerns the Kingdom. Stay her. Bid her speak.

ABSALOM *comes forth from his House.*

ISRAELITES.

Peace, peace !
Behold who cometh down,
With hasty steps, and face afire with wrath :
Absalom, Absalom,
The well-beloved !

ABSALOM.

Are there no labours left for brawny arms,

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But ye must lewdly throng about my doors,
Young men and old, and with such cruel eyes
Laugh at the hideous downfall of your kind?
What thing is that ye bait about the streets?
Shame on your manhood, and your scant grey hairs!
Away!

TAMAR.

O, O, Absalom, Absalom! [*Turning from him.*

ABSALOM.

O burst, my heart! O horror of deep hell!
O terrible suspicion of my soul!
O monstrous birth of foul adulterous dreams!
Did I not see it? Did I not foreknow?
Now let the sun go down to dawnless night,
And the earth burn to ashes! . . . Out upon thee,
Man! . . Let the fathers take their daughters now
To their lascivious arms, the sons their mothers,
And men lie down with dogs! . . . Where was the King
When this was done? In what voluptuous breast

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Pillowed the royal head of Israel
When this dishonour did devour his house?
How can the Kingdom prosper, and the world
Keep on in virtue's way, if Kings are losels,
And thou, Lord, sleepest? [*Draws his sword.*] Die,
and hide thy shame
Deep in the covering earth: the chaste cold clods
Will disinfect thy poor, polluted flesh,
And gnaw thy stains away. [*Offers to slay* TAMAR.

ISRAELITES (*interposing*).

Alas, alas!
Hold, hold thy hand, and add not woe to woe,
Darkening in one day all thine Israel's hope!

TAMAR.

Strike here, strike deep, for thou wert ever kind
And gentle. Yea, if thou hast pity or love,
Strike swift, and make an end!

ABSALOM (*offering again to slay her*).

Ay, thus . . . But no,

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Not in *thy* blood this sword. Stand thou and be
My witness. It is well that thou shouldst live . . .
[*To the Crowd.*] This is the work of Amnon and
the King.
O men of Israel, hear my voice ! I came
Unto the King, and cried in bitter woe
That he would save her from that traitor's clutch,
For I forefelt the end—O there are dreams
That make the future now ; and there are thoughts,
Chill feelings, warnings, he is fool or mad
Who will not heed. The King would hear me not,
But with majestic hand waved me away.
I went, but not to drowse. I went to mould
A scheme of vengeance if an ill should fall :
And it *has* come, and all my mind is armed.
I have forewrought a ruin for their houses
Will make all Israel tremble . . Amnon, Amnon,
By this hand thou shalt die a fool's death, Amnon !

YOUNG MEN.

Yea, for the ill he hath wrought,
Be thine anger pitiless.

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We will laugh, we will laugh at his pride down-
brought,
We will revel in his distress.
Humble him lower than scorn
Could stoop for its loathly food,
Unwept, forgotten, forlorn,
A worm of a pestilent brood !

ABSALOM.

But think not that his pain will glut my rage,
Or satisfy my soul ! The King's the guilt.
I say the King's a dotard on his throne.
Why do ye shrink, ye old, white-bearded men ?
What fear ye ? I shall one day rule the realm,
Therefore I would protect it from decay.
The King hath done the utmost which his arm
Is potent to achieve. The early bloom
Dies early, howsoever bright its leaves.
The King doth falter in his glorious noon.
Have ye not eyes to see ? Why fights he not
At Rabbah ? Wherefore lulls he his sick soul
In slothful sleep within his chamber-walls,—

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He, whose strong arm was as the arms of ten
In battle, and whose wild ambitious thirst
Left room for none to glean one chance of glory?

MIBZAR AND YOUNG MEN.

Absalom! live Absalom! Absalom!

OLD MEN.

Peace, peace! It is a sickness of the will
To sway with every wind of every hour . . .
They will not be convinced!

YOUNG MEN.

Live Absalom!

ABSALOM.

I say, why suffer such a one to rule?
The King can govern not his house. Why, then,
Submit the Kingdom to his failing palms?

YOUNG MEN.

Rise, Absalom, and lead! . . .

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ABSALOM.

Suffer me, friends.
I have a grievous wrong to be avenged:
What if I mingle with the public cause
Mine own revenge?

YOUNG MEN.

'Tis well: thy wrong is ours,
And thy revenge is honey to our lips.

ABSALOM.

It will be brief. I grasp a larger good,
Move to a goal far off. I will not tarry
Long on the way to right a private wrong—
But as the spearman, passing to the fight,
May spike a serpent heaving in his path,
And then fare on; or one athirst in battle
Pluck off a citron to refresh his lips,
Lifting his buckler arm . . . Friends, unto me
Shall pass the sceptre when my father dies:
The King is dead already. I arise
To help the realm. Will *ye* not help your King?

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YOUNG MEN.

Live Absalom the valiant! We will help.

ABSALOM.

Go ye your ways to-day. This may not be
To-day, nor yet to-morrow. Go your ways.
But ere ye go, O look upon her face!
Remember Tamar! . . . Out, alas, my sister! . .
Come, get we in! Lean close upon my arm;
I will uphold thee, thou poor beaten flower! . .
Friends, linger not. Remember; and farewell!

[*Leads* TAMAR *into the House.*

YOUNG MEN.

Live Absalom! Absalom! live Absalom! . .
About, about, and get ye to your homes,
And with stout hearts ponder the thing to do.
Surely his cause is just. Let us obey.
Remember Tamar. Hence, and dream of this.

[*They disperse.*

OLD MEN.

Woe, woe! an evil thing hath sprung to-day—

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Trouble on trouble new for Israel,
The children with their fathers set at strife!

MANY OF THE CROWD.

Death fall upon thy soul, accursëd Amnon!

OLD MEN.

O weary toil, waste hope! is this the end?

MANY OF THE CROWD.

By the house unbuilded, the tools grown rusted,
The waggon unladen, the vats left dry,
By the mill-wheel silent and weed-encrusted,
By the flowers of the garden that thirst and die,
By the vacant home, and the young lives wasted,
The widowed mother, the little ones lorn,
By the lips unkissed and the loves untasted,
The lost wild souls with agony torn,
By our darkened dream, and our righteous longing
Baffled and blighted, our labour undone,
By the hopes betrayed, and the hates new-thronging,
By Israel languishing under the sun,
By the heart of the People smitten and bleeding,
By the days of our glory left as a span,

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By her voice indeed, by her scorned pleading,
We curse thee, O man!

THE MEN.

Come away, O, come away!
Why stand grieving any longer?
Can ye turn the river-courses
To the mountain? are ye stronger
Than the Will the worlds obey?
When an evil thing hath birth
From the inward secret sources
Of the heart or of the brain,
And it gathers strength amain,
Many-flowered, a weed of poison,
Shedding ruin on the earth,
Seeds of death for fruit and foison,
Blown about in every land,
Never skill of any hand
Shall outroot it; never fire
Burn its poisonous fibres dire;
Every meadow's purple grasses
Fold it; every vineyard's soil
Breeds its dull and dusky masses,

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Mingling death with wine and oil,
Marring all the goodly plan
Of the patient husbandman,
And the harvest of his toil.
Now this hour a deed discloses
From the womb whereof shall spring
Evils thick as desert sand.
Deep in dreams thy heart reposes,
Israel, and thy wearied wing
Foldeth for a little slumber
In the hollows of the land,
And a little respiting
From thy many days of sorrow:
But the dawning of to-morrow
Brings the olden griefs again,
Sorrows gathering without number,
Pain on pain.
Friends, it is an olden tale.
With the weary heart's decay
Soon will end the bitter day.
Cease o'er fated ills to wail.
Come away! [*They disperse.*

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SCENE VI. *Under the Walls of Rabbah.*

URIAH *wounded*, BENAIAH, WARRIORS.

URIAH.

THERE: set me with my face towards the walls;
Let me die here.

BENAIAH.

Ah! here the arrow flies,
Here hurls the slingers' hail. Nay, suffer us,
Brave friend, to bear thee on.

URIAH.

Not in the tents—
Not in the tents, I say!

BENAIAH.

Here death were sure:
We do not well to risk so brave a life:

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Thy wounds indeed are many: but sweet herbs
And leech's craft can make thee whole again.

URIAH.

Death are my wounds: leave me to die a-field,
Here where my worthier mates lie cold and stark . . .
O Joab, Joab, what a deed was this ! . .
What will the King say when ye bear him home
The tidings of this reckless vain exploit ?
It was ill done to drive us to the walls.
I saw, but I obeyed . . . Alas, my King,
My loss is nothing : all content I die :
But the rich branches of thy host are bare
As olive-boughs late beaten with the poles,
And a fool's hand hath smit them, and the fruit
Fallen in the mullock. Valour, strength all lost !
O worse than rash,—dull, base, and thriftless fool !
Brave lives are cheap as dust, that he can spare
To fling them thus i' the wind ! . . O, the King's men,
His tried companions in a hundred fights,
Prop of his life, strong wall of Israel ! . .

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His heart lies widowed ! . . What a knave is he
That husbands not the lives of them he leads,—
The realm's wealth, and his own wealth for the realm !
I 'll think no more of it. It makes me weak
As woman, and a woman's tears are these.
But tell the King I die not murmuring,
Yea, bless his name, who suffered me to die
A soldier's death . . . Bend nearer . . . my strength fails . . .
This . . . this . . . she gave me . . . my own wife . . . my wife . . .
Bear it to her . . . put it beside my lips . . .
And tell her . . . Ah ! a little water, friends—
Tell her . . . but they are nigh . . . my wife ! my King !

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SCENE VII. *On the road between Joppa and Jerusalem. A little plain, with* PEASANTS *toiling in the fields.*

NATHAN, *journeying towards Jerusalem, stops suddenly, and cries aloud.*

NATHAN.

WOE! woe! woe! woe! a blight, a blight of all!..

Ah, patiently ye toil, swart valley-folk—
Women and men; nor now in sullen round,
Like yonder oxen pushing from the plough,
But with free will and glad prospective eyes.
Thus, thus the stubborn wilderness is broken,
It burgeons, and unfolds its leafy green:
The rock hath yielded fruit, the mountain-clefts
Arrayed themselves with summer. Patient thrift!
The fountains trickling from their niggard heights

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Are garnered in; the bucket heaves and dips;
The frequent water-ducts bubble with life:
Up from the stony places springs the maize
With food all-golden as the honeycomb;
The fig-trees lift their green translucent leaves,
And fruited fingers brown; and the lithe vine
Coils her entwining limbs about the staves,
And bears her purple splendour to the sun:
And the ways widen for the traveller's foot,
Far journeying; and the white-walled villages
O'ertop their girdling olives on the hills.
O Land, with what changed face to-day thou smilest!
Yea, like a nestled babe, tossed in the grass,
Gurgling for gladness, laughest thou to heaven . . .
Thine, David, thine the dream, and thine the deed;
Thine was the passion moved the stubborn arm,
Guided the brain, made valiant the dull tribes—
The people's heart is thy heart, and their hope
Out-branches from thy breast . . . all thine!—Ah
God,
So fair a dream, so fair accomplishment!
So rich a soul, so low and vile a fall!

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So vast a harvest, and decay so swift!
O Father, draw me back into the wilds,
And wreak thine anger with another's hand!
Here let me fall and die. How can I smite
The pillar of the realm, and see its fall,
And bear to know mine arm the ruin makes?
But no! Thou drivest onward pitilessly,
While the dark deed smells rank upon the air . . .
Woe! woe! woe! woe! an end, an end of all!

FIRST PEASANT (*in the fields*).

What man is that? [NATHAN *passes on.*

SECOND PEASANT (*in the fields*).

Is 't not the man of God,
Nathan? Ay, surely, journeying with strange speed,
As to a judgment. Heard'st thou not a cry,
"Woe, woe," upon the air? Methought I heard it,
There, when he paused, and turned to gaze at us,
And now as hence he passed with lifted palms.

FIRST PEASANT.

See how he strains, back-leaning, as one bends

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Against the following tempest, and uplifts
His hands as if imploring.

FIRST PEASANT.

'T is the power
Of God that drives him whither he would not—
Dread agony !—Bow down, for it is meet.

SECOND PEASANT.

It cannot be an evil for the realm,—
Earthquake, or plague, or famine, or the strife
Of brethren : for we bear a sway divine.

FIRST PEASANT.

The voice of Absalom about the Land
Hath burthened me with fears.

SECOND PEASANT.

An evil thing,
If men should lend an ear. Ah, think not of it !
To work—and working, wear the dream away.

[*They fall to work again.*

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SCENE VIII. *Jerusalem. Inside the* KING'S *Palace. A Storm without.*

DAVID, ABISHAI, CAPTAINS.

DAVID.

AWAKE my Gibborim with sound of trump;
Uplift the burnished buckler in the sun;
Let every sword leap from its idle sheath;
And, with the old glad music in our ears,
March we to Rabbah. Then, when one gem more
Beams in the girdle of our victories,
I will conduct my warriors to a field
That shall outredden all the waste of war.

ABISHAI.

Hail, hail the battle! hail the goodly noise
Of war's loud preparation in the Land!

DAVID.

O happy dawns, thus with unbounded beam,

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And promise of illimitable light,
Revisit us, laughing brief night to scorn!

CAPTAINS.

Up, up; let every heart its hopes renew,
And every arm revive dear youth again!

ABISHAI.

Forth every sword! Away! [*Goes.*

CAPTAINS (*following*).

O joyous hour!

DAVID (*alone*).

Ye thought, blind hearts, my purpose ended there,
Because ye could not lift your eyes in hope
Beyond the rims of Olivet! . .

VOICES (*without*).

Arm, arm!
The King hath risen for wide-subduing war.
Cry Israel awake!

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DAVID.

. . And deem ye now
Thick-falling dews of slaughter slake my soul,
Or war is dear but for the good it yields?
It is the bloody road to Paradise,
The peaceful Eden stretched o'er many lands,
Of which my land the central soul shall be.
Into the East, into the rifts of dawn
Thy sword shall pierce, O Israel, and thy palms
Spread, gathering spoil on spoil! . .

WARRIORS (*without*).

Awake, awake!
The King hath risen, therefore let the Earth
Quail, and the nations tremble!

DAVID.

. . Far as the wings
Of day move, winnowing the golden West,
Thy name shall be a wonder in the world;
Thy law the realms obey. Slow as the growth
Of the spiked aloe's bloom thy promises

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Unfold for thee, a flower in many years.
If thou shalt be among all peoples highest,
How shall thy kings upon the earth's wide tracts
Plant thy foundations, save the all-conquering sword
Sweep clear the fields of every potent foe?
Then, welcome the loud clang of war, the strokes
Of battling arms, the wine of victory!

WARRIORS (*without*).

Sweetest sounds to soldier's ear,
Smitten shield, and rattling quiver,
Clang of sword, and clink of spear,
Cymbal's clash, and trumpets' shiver!

DAVID.

Ay, sing and shout, brave hearts! Ye cannot know
A stormier joy than mine, a richer hope,
A keener expectation. I am whole.
There is a morning vigour in my heart
Invincible as light. Now is my world
Free as the upper air. Stronger mine arm
To-day than in the prime of lusty youth:

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And green as after-summer meadows spring
The hopes, the dreams, the purposes, and powers.
Blow, winds, without; and clash brave sword and
spear,
And sing, with voices blending with the winds,
Glad soldiers! Never hath my soul gone down
The valley of death, but stronger for its griefs
It hath arisen; and the mighty dream
Takes shape this hour anew, and I behold
All I have yearned to do, and how to do it:
And now no languor: now shall I prevail. [*Goes.*

SCENE IX. *On the road from Jerusalem to Baalhazor.*

ADONIJAH, SHEPHATIAH, ITHREAM, JONADAB, ATTENDANTS.

ADONIJAH.

SPEED we. The day wears on. We ill requite
Our hospitable brother with delay.

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ITHREAM.

I have not lagged.

SHEPHATIAH.

Nor I—not willingly.

ADONIJAH.

But Amnon loiters, dragging at the heel.

SHEPHATIAH.

And it hath been not Amnon's wont to lag
When wine-cups bubble, and savour of roast flesh
Smokes in the air.

ITHREAM (*looking back*).

No queasy stomach his.—
See, how the lubber droops a wagging head,
And with incontinent thumb lets slip the rein,
Tripping his mule, . .

SHEPHATIAH.

Which, wiser, makes a meal
Now when he may—Ha, ha ! wake, Amnon, wake! ..
Turn, Jonadab.

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JONADAB.

Nay, friend, in such a sun
'T is a scant pleasure turning round the head.

ADONIJAH.

E'en Jonadab is sadder than his wont.

JONADAB.

I sad! Ay, sad for gnats and buzzing flies,
Hot dust in bowlfuls, and too much of broil.
O Baal, what a maw hath man, to dare
Death for a banquet! Ugh, these feasts, these feasts!
To ride through fire for friendship; to drink deep
For friendship; to set boiling blood and brain
For friendship; and to say, "Thanks, thanks, good sir;
Tender destroyer, mercilessly kind,
How sapient hast thou left me with thy wine!
How comfortably lissome with thy roast!"
O Absalom the kind, O Absalom,
What marvel that our Amnon speeds to thee?

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SHEPHATIAH.

Nay, thou hast drunk already.

JONADAB.

Like enow:

And wine and flesh beget such dreams between them!

ITHREAM (*looking back*).

Look how his chin goes bobbing on his breast,
Like an old epileptic rivetless!

ADONIJAH.

Ay, but our brother meaneth friendly cheer.
Whoso reluctant dallieth, doth affront
His royal soul. Ho, Amnon! To the feast!

SHEPHATIAH.

Cry "danger!" to the salt that was Lot's wife!

ITHREAM.

Ho, Amnon, smellest thou no wine i' the air?

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JONADAB.

Belike he prayeth—call him yet again.

ADONIJAH.

Thou art his soul's companion. Call him thou.

JONADAB.

(Fate, who may stay thee?) . . Amnon, to the feast!
On to thy glory, Amnon!

ALL.

Amnon, Amnon,
Pluck up thy heart—On, Amnon, to thy feast!

[*They pass along.*

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ACT III.

SCENE I. *Jerusalem. A Room in the* KING'S *Palace.* DAVID *and* NATHAN *from opposite sides.*

NATHAN.

DOWN, and essay it not!

DAVID.

Back! stand not thou
Betwixt me and the hope of Israel!

NATHAN.

Stretch not thy hands against thy God. The blood,
The innocent blood that thou hast spilt, shall spread
Wide as the ocean, to divide thy feet
From that whereto thou strivest. Fallen, fallen
Thy glory, all hope dead, thy deeds undone!

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DAVID.

His blood! . . ah! ah! . . my heart can bear no
more.
Back to thy paths, and leave me with my sin . . .
Or, if thou wilt, pluck out my sword, and quell me
Beyond all opportunity of hurt,
All visitings of shame: as well do this
As leave me what I am. Thou hast this hour
Outstruck the mightiest stroke of all the tribes:
Kings, nations I defy; but thy dread word,
Winged with the eternal thunder and the fire,
Routs all my powers, smites dead my battling
arm,
Quenches the steadfast courage of my breast,
Unfoots the watchful pilot of the brain,
Breaks up my life with shame, and shatters me
Into a spray. I am surrounded, trapt,
And mocked before the eyes of all the world.

[*Prostrates himself.*

O Earth, that thou wouldst open up thy jaws
And take me home again!

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NATHAN.

Now the dark worst
And deadliest sorrow of my life is over.
I go away—go as the spiritual storm
Drives me across the spaces of the world.
Lift up thine eyes, that I may go in peace.

DAVID.

I cannot lift my face to thine again,
Or gaze upon the scornful brows of men;
I am mated with the earth, and in the dust
I will lie down for ever.

NATHAN.

Nay, my King.
Look up, and speak. This sight is hard to bear.

DAVID.

My people! O my people! O my realm!

NATHAN.

Thou art not all rejected, though so fallen.
Arise, and live, and let thy people live.

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DAVID.

Into my heart's dark cavern thou hast flashed
An awful beam, and I behold my ways
All loathsome; and the thoughts, the purposes,
That guide me or incite, clear to their springs,
Fountains of ill discern; and all my soul
Crawled over with broods born of long decay.
Let rise another king, for I am none.

NATHAN.

Tread back the mazy paths to Him whose love
Led thee so long in glory. Call aloud,
And He will answer from the lonely heights.

DAVID.

To Him, to Him! All unfamiliar now
The too familiar name, and powerless
My lips to shape. Repent! How can the soul
Repent at impulse the deliberate sin?
And I—O God!—for every question asked
Of conscience, rendered answer answerless;
With strong premeditated aim trod out

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The light divine of reason, man's one guide,
Heaven's sacred emissary; with free hand
Crowning the monster evil in my heart;
And, shameless, all my faculties awake,
As righteous men choose virtue, chose my sin,
And smiled upon my choice. Where the remorse?
All gentle thoughts and gentle impulses,
Fair ministers of virtue, I have slain,
To make a happy tranquil field of growth
And nursery of my darling weed of sin,
And nought abides to lift me or impel.

NATHAN.

He hath not changed, He lives—the Eternal God.

DAVID.

I said, "I have attuned my heart with God's,
Be then, my heart, my guide;" and at its hests
I followed or obeyed; nor did recall
His laws, for reason's help or passion's suaging,
Forgetful, careless, that the heart's desire
Moves proudly with strong wave against His will;

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And nature trusted is an errant guide—
Ay, nature doth take arms against herself,
And works her own undoing.

NATHAN.

Yet He speaks
Through all created things; His universe
Revealing the inviolable law.

DAVID.

Ah! strange the momentary consequence
Should seem the evil mandate of the heart
To justify. I had wrenched a chain that cramped
me;
I had broken a long sleep of heart and arm—
A languor, a disease, of inward strife
And nature's turmoil bred—letting my soul
Free in its natural field. I had arisen
Self-harmonized, renewed in heart, mind, limb,
A man wide-eyed, of purpose definite
And clear creative dream. Thou foundest me
A conqueror, and all my people's hope

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Lifted with mine. Stoopt Rabbah at my voice;
Out of its satiate slumber shook the Land,
And rose new-born for victory. I would draw
The realms together with a noose, and work
A fairer dream than ever poet sung.
But thou hast pushed me and my people back,
And flung me lower in the pit of shame
Than e'er king fell.

NATHAN.

My King, my King, not mine,
But the eternal law of God proclaimed
Through my lips passive. Humbly hear His voice,
Nor let thine heart in dark rebellion strive
Longer with Him.

DAVID.

What if I had outweighed
The little act of ill in my vast triumph?
This might have been.

NATHAN.

Ah, vain! For this one crime
Outweighs the full fair deeds of all thy days.

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DAVID.

I know not what had been. The piteous face
That haunted me with meek reproachful eyes,
Might time have worn away. I might have held
Fast the foul secret from the world, and lived
Untroubled to the end. It might have been.

NATHAN.

Thou couldst not hide it from the eyes of God.
Thou couldst not pluck the memory from thy soul.

DAVID.

Ha? Think'st thou that? Perchance thou 'rt in the
right . . .
'T is like enough, 't is like enough . . . Dread shape
That liest on my pillow, driving me
Forth from my chamber, pushest bloody brows
Betwixt my lips and the untasted wine,
And when I would enfold thy pilfered love,
Between her bosom and mine arms dost stand,
To lay indignant palms upon my breast! . .
He grows incorporate with mine eye, a blot

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From sight inseparable, mingled up
With all the earth and heavens . . . Thou 'rt in the
right:
We cannot slay the phantoms of the mind,
How swift so'er our swords to quench poor lives.
Ay, life, the things of life, and all earth's sweets,
Will smell of this foul death until I die.

NATHAN.

O strange, incomprehensible, dark fall!
Thou the most sacred soul of Israel,
The chosen, the beloved of God!—Alas
That ever eye of man should see thee thus,
Or tongue of man proclaim this sin as thine!
Oft, in the midmost glory of thy days,
That haply even from thy strength might grow
Hurt to thyself, with years, hurt to the realm,
My soul foreboded. But a deed so foul
Lived not within imagination's ken.

DAVID.

And yet the all-seeing God, from whom these husks
Hide nothing, He hath seen, and understood

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How easy was it from so fair a height,
Ay, and with purpose pure, so low to fall.

NATHAN.

As natural, to my reason, the sun's swoop
Back from the kindling dawn as this deed thine.

DAVID (*rising*).

My life hath been a splendour and a vision
Since first in glee I chased the mountain-moths,
And gambolled with the kids upon the hills.
A lone child shepherding my father's flock,
I gazed into the golden-fringëd clouds,
Mountain o'er mountain, thronged with flaming hosts
Gold-morioned, fiery-sworded,—world on world
Of mystic glory, up through which I passed,
A warrior dealing magic strokes, a king
Building, o'erthrowing, golden realm on realm.
O, no more real on the stubborn earth
Ofttimes have seemed the fields whereon I have moved

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Thigh-deep in carnage; ay, as much a dream
The adamantine rock that struck again
Shivers the lance to splinters, the rough hands
That wrench the wrist in combat, voice of friends,
Mine own tongue's speech, joy, sickness, strength, or pain:
So subtly hath imagination woven
Vision with truth confused; the thing which is
With that which is not, blending; the mind's realm
Peopling the actual with phantasmal shapes,
And mingling its wild glory with the world's.
So ofttimes with unconscious feet I have fared
On to the vast accomplishment of deeds
That pictures seemed, and whatso'er opposed
Razed, their destruction not more grave appearing
Than shift or cancel a weak word in rime,
Or note in music, or a thought expunge;
With soul deliberate crushing holy life,
As though my hands were fantasies, and that
The bubble of a dream.

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NATHAN.

Alas, alas!
Though man the vesture of a god may bear,
Yet, being man, a man's humility
Beseems him, not to spurn the daily road;
And what avails the mind's proud loneliness,
If a man's best be blotted out in crime?

DAVID.

My life hath been a rapture and a storm—
Passion and action, rolling, force with force,
The whirlwind with the thunder in its heart;
Tempestuous feeling and tempestuous stroke;
Time but for passion's eager utterance
In song or deed, little within to peer,
Unravel the thick mystery of the mind,
And purpose weigh with purpose, quality
Of action test with motive, walk the trail
Of reason backward from her goals of rest,
Or track a doubtful virtue to its springs.
So in the passionate uncontrollable
Storm of desire, I have driven against the world—

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An energy, a power, like God's great winds,
Or mounded billows rolling through the deep:
And, heeding not the cries of pain that rose
About my feet, fair deeds with ruin mixed,
Drunk with the vision of the larger good.
And yet the best prevailed,—and should prevail,
For greatly have I hungered for the good
Through meaner longings. But in this one sin
Held closely in mine eyes, I see indeed
The mirrored microcosm of my life,
The web of motives and desires unwoven,
And ill through all the threads. A selfish life . .
And yet not wholly selfish—O just God,
Not wholly selfish! for I deemed my heart
The root of Israel, fed it for his weal,
That, through its strength, the goodly tree might rise
High o'er his forest neighbours, branch and bear,
And spread his leafy wealth across the world.

NATHAN.

Woe! woe! as far along the voiceful earth

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As Israel's name hereafter shall resound,
Shall be proclaimed thy splendour and thy sin;
And men shall wonder as I wonder now,
And sorrow as I sorrow; for thy fall
Is not thine only: 't is the vast despair
And failure of all men unto all time—
The nothingness of man. And, lo, thy grief
Gathers for thee, and all thy heavens are dark!

DAVID.

Ay, it shall come—the blast, the fire of God,
And I shall stand alone in all that storm.
Hear me. I did esteem thee among my slaves,
Thee, Nathan, little; nearer to God's lips
Mine ear than thine, more favoured I than thou—
Did He not seem my soul's familiar friend?—
Up from the unknown sea of the world's life
Thou art lifted to rebuke me at the last,
And show more base my fall; thou art my judge,
And just thy condemnation, just thy wrath:
And yet I tell thee, Prophet, thy calm heart
Hath known me not, *thou* canst not understand.

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Even as the flower-tassel of the palm
Pushes against its sheath for the dear air;
Even as the spring's great agony ere she break,
New-kindling the brown branches into fire,
The struggle of my spirit with its bonds,
Tumult of heart or brain, ere thought in form,
Passion in sweet divine activity,
Or songs, whereon the sad heart of the world
Shall ease itself in music, felt release.
So through the earlier to the latter years
Pain alway and impellent agony,
Not without sweet, accomplishment foreran;
And never lack of project, dearth of dream,
The spiritual travail, births of deeds,
Divinest agitation—life, life, life—
Through prosperous days on days. Then came a mood,
Insidious, furtive, gathering unaware,
Wherein ambition, drooping heavy wings,
Sickened, and, with its sickness, hope, the vision
That ever clearly rose in amber air,
And the heart's gladness, and the sinewed arm,

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All shrivelled up—a weary, wildering mood,
A long, a heavy, an untimely pain:
And in the dull putrescence of that hour
The love forbidden sprang. Then my vext soul
Stood armed against itself in ruining war;
For the dread passion, heaving in my breast,
Fiercer than waves that sweep or winds that rend,
Tore me in conflict. Never impulse drave
More vehement: not the valorous ecstasy
That bade me from the rillet pluck the stone
Wherewith I smote the Philistine: not that
That did sustain me when in jungle-reeds
I fought with beasts, and from the lion's jaw
Tore the loved lamb: no, nor my life's elation,
When, in the swaying battle motionless
Watching until appeared the little rift,
I have drawn my hosts together with glad cry,
And hurled against the foe, and made an end.
Of old, it was the passion and the will
With nature's bonds contending; now the will
With nature and her longings, impotent,
Strove in reluctant war: and while it strove,

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I seemed my very means of life to slay.
The soul's deep thirst it was, the natural love,
At war with social wisdom, social law
(Sweet nature's other self, sacred as she),
And my worn will allied. Another time,
If such an impulse rose, I had obeyed,
And in obedience profited the world.
I strove, I drooped, I languished. At the last
It leapt all bounds. Then I was free—a man—
Ay, with a rapture in the life o' the world
Sweeter than ever in delirious spring,—
A joy that did uplift me, a new strength
Whereby across the spaces of the earth
My arm would sweep victorious; for that love
Had such transforming virtue in its breath,
My very limbs grew supple, and my sight
Measureless in its range. But *thou*, thine eye
Can never learn my love. Hold thou thy dream.
Thou canst not fathom it. And the raw world—
Ah God!—will put a meaning in its name
That was not in it, reading every deed
For ever by the lusts of its brute heart.

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I swear it was a god's—ay, and my deeds
Had been a god's, had been a god's, I swear,
If but this hand were guiltless—if that face
Came not between me and the whole sweet earth . . .
That face, that face . . . ah! ah! back from my
sight!
Hide ye, blank eyes! Hide, sad, beseeching brows!

[*Prostrates himself, covering his face with his hands.*

NATHAN.

Dark, dark thy sin, and heavy is thy doom.
Already doth the gathering trouble sound
Far off upon the air, rolling anear;
For all the evil growths of all thy deeds,
Thronging together, swarm upon the wind,
Thick as the locusts reddening over heaven,
And sweep upon thine unexpectant soul.
In thy fair dreams' oblivion, from thy hand
Neglectful seed of evils numberless
In fruitful and unfruitful soil has fallen:
Behold the harvest rolling to thy doors!
O, thou, that o'er the mightiest of the earth,

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High as the snowy dome of Hermon rears
Above the mountains, lifted thy proud head,
Lower than Sodom shalt bow down, thy life
Blasted, consumed, and all thy hopes reversed;
That in the record of thy strength, thy sin,
Thy ruin, to the latest birth of babe,
Man may behold his littleness, and know
That, born of dust, though to a throne he crawl,
He sits before the Heavens a sceptred worm.—
. . Will he thus grovel in his agony
For ever? Sight of horror, sight of shame! . .
O Father, even as at Thy dark sign
I came all helpless, hence with dear release
Now draw me! All Thy mandate is obeyed;
And whereso'er Thou wilt, I drift away.
What can I more? But Thou, Most Merciful,
O, look with pity on his pride o'erthrown,
Raise, and restore! . . My King! . . Alas, my King!

[*Goes.*

DAVID (*after a pause, raising himself, and looking around*).

Gone? It is well. And yet this loneliness

Digitized by Google

Breeds deadlier companionship. Ay me!
Come, gentle dawn, with thine assuring eyes,
And loose me from this prison of the mind;
Drive, as thou drivest darkness from the heaven,
The ghostly visitants of the mind, begot
Of guilty memory, out of open doors,
And let come in the sweet things of the world,
That minister true healing to the brain.
Dark, dark: no kindly ray of any star,
Or shaft of moonlight, or the faint sweet lines
That harbinger the day . . . O, O, what hand
Will push back to its hell this heavy dead
That clings to every sense, heart, ear, and eye,
Haunting the ungovernable mind with fears
That earth, or light, or sanity ne'er bred! . .
I thought that I had slain thee out of sight,
And that the death dealt by thy natural foe
Should seem not this hand's deed. O, who can hide
His own sin from him, when dark conscience thus
Blackens the founts of thought? . . I cannot scape

Digitized by Google

Thy murdered face, nor with thy rightful love
Drown memory in delight.

VOICES (*without*).

Thou shalt not come
Into his presence now. We dare not. Tarry
Until the morrow. Back!

OTHER VOICES (*without*).

Woe! woe!

DAVID.

What cry
And noise of lamentation fill the air,
Stealing upon me, as the rushing rain
On leaves and waters, heard for many a mile
In its triumphant march, before the head
Needs shelter from the thunder and the fire? . .
The King awakes: approach, and tell thy tale . . .

A MESSENGER *and* ATTENDANTS *enter.*

Speak! let the storm break, ruining my life!
Thou hast an awful promise in thine eyes.

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MESSENGER.

O that I might die now or e'er I speak.
Accursëd be the day that I awoke
To learn this woe! Accursëd be the lot
That chose me from the throng to thrust a sword
Into thy heart, O King!

DAVID.

Speak bravely out!
Why dost thou stand thus, gaping at the heavens,
Adding to sorrow sorrow's expectation,
Keener than sorrow's self—the undefined
And formless ill for which we find no balm?

MESSENGER.

Then, hear me. Absalom, at Baalhazor,
Feasted the King's sons at the sheep-shearing.
Lo, in the noon of mirth and festival,
When heart with heart beat quickest, lip to lip
Flashed round the fleetest jest, arose a cry
That palsied every hand. There, from his place,
Had fallen Amnon slain.

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DAVID.

Why dost thou pause?
What wouldst thou, slave? On with thine evil
song!

MESSENGER.

O God, that I should deal the King this grief!
Absalom's servants, bearing at his beck
The hospitable wine, bore at his beck
Death likewise to the guests on whom he smiled . . .

DAVID.

On, on unto the end!

MESSENGER.

O that my tongue
Might here have rest! Then rose thy sons for
flight,
Seeing fell murder glare from every eye.
They rose to flee the house, from which their
feet
Ne'er parted. Absalom hath made the King
Childless in Israel. Absalom hath trampled

Digitized by Google

God's purpose in the mire, and left His people
Forlorn among the nations: and thy heart,
O King, this day, is left companionless,
Is left companionless!

VOICES (*without*).

Woe! woe! alas,
Alas for Israel that climbs to fall,
And cannot reach the goal with any guide!

DAVID.

O, is it not enough that I should stand
Childless this hour, but they must turn and lay
The burthen of their griefs upon my head,
And ere I die write failure on my tomb?

JOAB, JONADAB, *and* COUNSELLORS *enter hastily.*

O, O my children! O my ruined realm!

JONADAB (*to the* MESSENGER).

Fool, with thy vain and reckless blabbing
tongue,

Digitized by Google

Thou hast played traitor to thy king, and hurt
The heart and life of Israel.

DAVID.

What art thou?
What scurril knave art thou? Rebuke not him:
He hath done passing well. *Thou* art the traitor,
That, with thy smooth and wordy garnishment
Tricking a villain plot, didst steal from me
The fair young soul. Ay, talk not thou of comfort:
Thou art the slayer: talk not thou of hurts.

JONADAB.

The King unjustly doth upbraid his servant,
Who was as innocent of that great wrong
As joint or sinew, slave of a bad will.
Arise, O King, and know! Thy sons, save one,
And he the worker of that nameless ill,
Live all. Him only hath the avenger slain.
Amnon alone is dead.

DAVID (*to* JOAB *and* ATTENDANTS).

Is this thing true,
Or weaves he yet new meshes for my soul?

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JOAB.

He speaketh as one erring not in word
Or purpose.

JONADAB.

Hear me: when that evil fell,
Wrought by the caitiff hand, and when the King,
Pitying and loving him that did betray,
Forbore to kill, fierce-blooded Absalom,
Pricked in his pride, dishonoured in his love,
Swore to avenge: one only hath he slain.

DAVID.

O precious limit! Only Amnon!—only!—
Only the first-born! only my heart's pride!
Only the king elect of Israel!
Only the King's house set against itself!
Only the King's authority o'erthrown!
Only my Amnon, Amnon! O God, God!
Was there not one eye watchful, one quick arm,
One, one heart faithful among all my servants,
To stay this treacher's rage? . . O Absalom,

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When have I wronged thee, when have I oppressed thee,
Forborne to pardon thee, forgot to love thee,
That thou shouldst set this spear against my breast?

ADONIJAH, SHEPHATIAH, *and* ITHREAM *hurry in.*

Out, out upon you! Come ye sound?—no scath,
No wound, no slightest scar on wrist or arm
Lifted to help a brother in his need?
Death! ye are traitors—traitors, every soul;
Each one of you a dastard, hugging up
A life far nobler squandered 'twixt his breast
And that which stilled it. Were ye blind with drink?
Slumbered ye?—were ye mad when this was done?
O brotherhood, O loyalty, O valour,
All, all, all shent, dishonoured, and betrayed!..
Out of my sight! 'T were better ye had died
All in one slaughter, than to bear me back
These faithless, loveless, and most craven souls!..
Where is thy brother?

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ADONIJAH.

Alas! dead—dead, my lord!

DAVID.

Thou 'rt one step nearer that thou covetest
By that word "dead!" O, ye are rebels all—
Absalom, Adonijah, Ithream,
Thou—all! no love, no faith, no gentleness!
All armed against your king!

SHEPHATIAH.

Most royal sir, . .

DAVID.

Dost fawn? Dost quich the knee?—What surety have I
That such another deed shall not be done
An hour hence? or that cloaked rebellion prowls not
Under the skirts of darkness while I sleep? . .
O God, O God, nay, who am I that judge? . .
Ye have done nought—no crime, no duty's breach—

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No sin of hand, or lip, or dark intent,
That I have not outsinned a thousandfold.
Forgive me, sons; thou, Jonadab; all ye
On whom my random anger ever broke;
And let me hence to pray. . . [*They make gestures of pity.*] Nay, thwart me not.
What can ye do for solace? Can ye lift
My dead upon his feet? Or wipe away
This evil from my kingdom? Can ye purge
Your king's heart of its swarm of secret sins,
Corruption's brood on brood? Can ye push back
The thick cloud leaning heavy on the winds,
And save me from my ruin? No, no, no;
Only the angry, much-offended God
Can quench this evil. Comfort? comfort? none—
His face is hidden from me, and my earth
Is utter darkness . . . Stay Thy hand, O God!

[*Goes out.*

JOAB.

Speak none: but each man sadly to his house.
Earthquake and storm tear open to the heart

Digitized by Google

The unstable Kingdom. And the hand of one
Is all too weak to clench this gulf again.
Bide we the larger evil coming on.

COUNSELLORS.

Oh, 't is the curse of nations on themselves
Not leaning, but on one poor human arm
Weariable, one will that breaks at last,
And all go down to darkness with its fall.
We have been fools in sloth: and lo, the end!

[*All except* JONADAB *pass out.*

JONADAB.

I, who have sprung this evil; I, who know
The good and spurn it; I, who can foresee
Hurt to my kind, and lift no warning hand,
Nor care to arrest it; I, who am all wrenched
From the erect fair ways of honest men,—
What do I here? 'T were better I were gone,
Clean gone. This growing ruin of the realm,
This loss of friends, this sorrow of my king,
This profitless and weary way of life,

Digitized by Google

Suck up the sap that makes endurance, break
The spirit that with trouble might contend.
The world to me is nothing. I to it
A hurt—a treacherous and crooked eft
That multiplieth pain. This hour to me
The world is absolute nothing. Let it go.

[*Draws his sword.*

The subtle slippery steel set here—e'en here—
And pressed—e'en thus—toward the mystic springs,
Rids me at once of man, and man of me;
And so, good-night! . . But ponder. I have known
Despair, and shame, satiety, love's wreck,
Sundering of friends, the wakeful inwit's wrench,
The passionless and dreamless void of soul,
And many a pang ere now, and held the sword
As close to my sick heart; and shook my head,
And sheathed it: and have smiled the morrow morn,
Finding a pleasure I had missed in death,
And, after, keener pleasure. Ay. But this!
Such weariness of earth, such shame, such fear,
Such emptiness of heart and eye and brain,
I have not known. Now slay, if ever, slay.

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Thus . . . What a goodly glitter hath the steel!
The flash did well-nigh blind my dazëd eyes—
So—turned against the sun—so—so—turned—
so . . .
What if I died to-day, and, though well dead—
Let me surmise that this were possible—
Beheld great gladness here upon this earth,
Suddenly sprung among surviving men?
Why, then the grave would prove an irksome bed.
So: the world's wide: there's pleasure in the world
I yet have tasted not . . . Hence, to thy sheath!
[*Sheathes his sword.*
It is the trouble of this realm that wounds me,
The pain of neighbourhood, local suggestion;
The evil done, of which I am a part;
Pain of the many weighing on my soul;
The dread anticipation of the end:
These I can brook not: better death than these.
Yet elsewhere may delight not dawn for me?
Then, I will out into the alien lands—
Hath Tyre no sweet? Hath Egypt nothing
strange?—

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There roam, and wear the teeth of conscience down,
Soften the painful hues of memory,
Drink palatable wines, renew the sense,
Learn much, see out this curious road of life,
And haply, after many rounds of years,
And when this evil is an olden tale,
Return in calmer hours another soul.
So, farewell, friends, and welcome ways unworn.

[*Goes.*

SCENE II. *Hebron. Before the Tent of* ABSALOM.

ABSALOM *and* AHITOPHEL.

ABSALOM.

THOU 'RT welcome, and thy coming is my crown.
The cities and the valleys cry to me;
The trodden slave, the vanquished alien cries;

Digitized by Google

The young and proud, ambitious, faint for fame;
The warrior unpromoted; the chief fallen;
The harshly judged; the desolated poor;
The husbandman that fails in narrow fields,—
All hearts aggrieved, despoiled, unhonoured cry;
And by the popular acclaim I stand
King, rightful King. Behold, now, this is well;
And I, to whom a life of littleness
Were hard as death, who moved in mockery
Before all tribes, whose bloody late revenge
Was but as oil to fatten my great hate,—
I am not one to stuff a wakeful ear
When sounds so sweet on every blast are borne.
Know, then, whate'er the doom, this deed I dare.

AHITOPHEL.

Thou hast done craftily, from little sparks,
With cloaked intent, to kindle such a fire.
Keenly thine eye has found in hidden brakes
The fuel fit, and quickly thine apt hand
Heaped it together. In the happiest sway,
Such discontented and opposing spirits

Digitized by Google

Shall alway breed. The fatness of a realm
Engenders worm with fruit and weed with flower:
And he that would from sovran fingers draw
The coveted sceptre, hath a weapon stretched
(If eye be his to see) hilt to the hand.
But mark me: when the usurper's need is sped,
Back to the mire the filthy tool he flings;
And that which was his stay, his danger proves,
And that becomes his bane which was his boon.
Trust not too dearly to this ravenous herd.
Such spirits thronged thy father in the caves
Of Judah, when that sorrow bent his king;
And these against the splendour of his throne
Now their foul shoulders heave. Tread warily.
Suffer the guidance of these wrinkled hands.
Up, and attain: but know, thy strife, O youth,
Is not as his who from prophetic palms
Rose glamoured with that light of sanctity
Which drowses every sense, and charms the will,
And renders reasonless the ways of men.
Therefore of wary steps the larger need.

Digitized by Google

ABSALOM.

Nay, through the thunder of the People's voice
God speaks; and with the oil of popular will
I am anointed—ay, and I am strong,
Through harrowed love, the fever of revenge,
The spurred and beaten passions of a man;
Bind me with chains, and, like the blinded Samson,
I 'll rend them as burnt flax. I hate the King.

AHITOPHEL.

And yet the great King loved thee, Absalom,
And many times forgave. O, rather mourn
So dire a fall, seeing, if he hath failed,
How poor the chances of the lesser man!
Not with a heart elate, but sorrowfully,
With slow reluctant feet I hither came,
Leaving my home in Giloh, and the peace
That might have been the guerdon of my years:
I came because no doom the Land can know
Than this more dread—uncertainly to sit
Before the sceptre of a ruined king,
And bear the governance of helpless hands,

Digitized by Google

While, impotent, he loiters in his days,
Dragging toward death, and lets the lusty heir
Ripen and rot in vigour unemployed.

ABSALOM.

Surely thou hast not erred—thou of the elders
Wisest, the very oracle of God,
Whom all men held the wisest next the King—
And he now wrecked, wisest in Israel.
To thee I bow mine ear, as never yet
To living man I bowed; thy counsel crave:
And, so thou puttest not on passionate blood
Restraint too heavy, willingly obey.

AHITOPHEL.

Then, for the dear, dear love of Israel—
O, if thou lovest Israel, not thyself,
Or canst but know that Israel's hope is thine—
Be wary, patient, circumspect, and calm;
Slow to resolve, sudden and swift to do,
And thorough all thy deeds. Content thee well
With present gains, and let no pickle fall

Digitized by Google

Of all thy gathering. Throughly glean thy field.
Sow with a measured hand, and choose the soil
Wherein thou sowest. Loose not thy young
heart
To reckless cruelty, or reckless loves;
Or empty fume of threats, the sluggard's arm;
Or lies, the spawn of fear; or boastfulness,
The bastard child of vanity begotten
Of an incontinent tongue; or giddy rage
O'ermounting reason, blinding steadfast eyes.
Hear well and hoard the counsels of the wise,
Yet act but with thy reason's countenance.
Beware of flattery's tongue, and trust not him
Who wears on lip a year-long lover's smile,
Or makes a laughing music of his words—
He is a coward, hiding something base,
A coward villain or a craven slave:
But trust no more the smileless sanctimonies,
And him that hath no humour in his eye.
Be slow to kindle wrath against thy friend;
For one friend lost is twenty added foes.
Lend not thyself to favourites a slave,

Digitized by Google

But mete an even love and gentleness.
Be liberal of kind greetings to the poor,
And thou shalt lead them with a viewless thread—
This art thou hast: O, act it worthier!
Reveal thy law, and strike with certain stroke
The true transgressor; strict in every deed,
Yet kindly, letting never go unsmit
The offender, nor unhonoured honest lives.
And, lastly, in thy people's happiness
Forget thy greatest pain, *thy* life be nothing:
So shalt thou prove thee worthy of this choice;
Thus only consecrate the rebel deed
That doth supplant thy king.

ABSALOM.

Thus, thus I rise
Strengthened at heart. I treasure up thy words;
And with what fervour, let the years reveal.
I am of moods impetuous, and my mouth
Crunches the bit. Know this, and lightly guide,
Humouring mine inclination; otherwise
Attempt it not, or from my gallëd back

Digitized by Google

I fling thee—and there lie! . . Enough: I hear,
And I remember . . .

MIBZAR, *the Edomite, and a* YOUTH *approach.*

Welcome, welcome, friends;
Thrice welcome. Come ye single-handed out,
Or come ye holpen?

MIBZAR.

Holpen, my good lord;
For fifty souls, as full of hate to David
As we of flowing love of thy good name,
Attend us in the field. Assurance too
I bring. Not fifty in Jerusalem,
If as a king thou comest to the gates,
Will lift a sword, or bend a threatening bow.

ABSALOM.

And this is sure, Ahitophel.—I thank thee:
I have not thee forgotten, nor thy prayer
For Edom thy beloved. Nor yet *thy* face,
Dear lad: what, shall not thou and I this hour
Attain alike the cup for which we thirsted?

Digitized by Google

YOUTH.

My lord, through roaring fire I 'll follow thee.

ABSALOM.

Stand at my side.—But see our mightiest arm !

AMASA *enters.*

Tidings, Amasa ?

AMASA.

Goodly cheer, my lord :
My levies are in sight.

ABSALOM.

O, bravely done !
No more on hesitating wing I poise,
But swoop upon my prey . . Thou art not sad,
Amasa ?

AMASA.

O my good lord, pardon me :
'T is little : it will pass. But, I have loved
My glorious king : and, but that more I love

Digitized by Google

Israel, and my reason to my heart
Commends this quick desertion—that an arm
Less tired and worn with labour help the Land—
I had not found my hands, this bitter dawn,
Lifted against the dearest of my breast,—
Companions of the battle, brothers, friends,
Whose honour was my honour yestermorn.
Yet fear me not. If I a waverer were,
Thou hadst not seen me standing here to-day.

ABSALOM.

Such pale and watery regrets and loves
My threshold come not nigh. Away with them!
They are contagious. Speak, Ahitophel.

AHITOPHEL.

Sadly I speak. On to Jerusalem.

ABSALOM.

Then, no more dallying. Up, and follow me!

[*They go.*

Digitized by Google

VOICES (*without*).

Now shall the hungry soul be fed, and now
The sick heart healed. O, great hath David been:
But Absalom more just. Break forth in song,
Ye hungry; and, ye poor, thunder his praise.

SCENE III. *Jerusalem. A Chamber in the* KING'S *Palace.*

DAVID *enters slowly, as in thought.*

DAVID.

HOW to redeem; how, from my ruined life,
To build before the eyes of mocking men
A tower of righteous deeds that shall efface
All memory of my sin; or, set by that,
Serve as ensample to the errant world
That through repentance may a heart defiled
Rise in endeavour to the realms of God.
Remorse or fear or love hath oft impelled
Diverse from ways of ill the young quick soul:

Digitized by Google

Not so the elder lives, whose jealous eye,
Bent inward, seldom suffers the will's throne,
Conjoint with reason's sceptre, be usurped
By childlike impulse fair for virtuous ends;
Though ofttimes yielding will's authority
Conjoint with reason's wand, an easy prey,
In counterfeited blindness, to the wield
Of darker passion, helping evil's march;
And by the will, for the will's overthrow,
As the half-waking mind directs its dream,
Fed furtively in cunning self-deceit.
And me, self-knowing, reasoned into sin,
With reason overreaching reason's self,
Self-blinded, wandering from the level paths,
That, stumbling, I might clasp the sweet forbidden,
No impulse more shall guide aright; but now
Reason and will, washed clean in sorrow's bath,
By humiliation sobered, cleared, and calmed—
Reason and will, Lord, by Thy love upheld . . .
O, teach them, Father, on Thy love to lean,
Thine only! To the fountains of Thy strength,
Thine only, lift my parched and thirsty lips,

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When the brain's eye forsakes me, and the wrist
Fails from the spear: take from my soul all loves
But that which binds me to Thy breast, and spreads
Towards the world even as Thy love, and lives
For all things with no taint of selfish care.
Stay, stay that trouble gathering even now
Up from my kingdom's midst—rebellion foul,
Hate of my dearest, breach of holiest bonds,
Dread severance of the Tribes. Or, if Thy will
These sorrows needs must suffer, let me pass
Unmurmuring through the fury of Thy fires.
O, from the ashes of my splendour spent
Build up a life crystalline, pure as air,
Not dazzling with the glory of vast deeds,
But beautiful in humble sanctity;

BATHSHEBA *enters, creeps gradually to his feet, and clasps his knees.*

That, if not by the might of conquering spears,
Triumphant empire, bodying of dreams,
At least—O, if it be not overmuch!—
By rare example of a contrite heart,

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I yield my people yet a larger boon ! . .
[*Seeing* BATHSHEBA.] O woman, woman, didst thou
not foretell
Thy love with its sweet dower would drag me
down,
Ruining all the labour of my years ?—
Seest thou the end ? Ay, not by love like that,
Not by thy dear dear love could the tired arm
Live strengthened, as I deemed, or the sick soul
Endure for perfect deeds. A little while,
Like glad wine in the veins, sufficed its spell
To help me weary onward in assay ;
But false, false, false the strength ; backward I fell,
Love-poisoned : for the love of woman breeds
With good manifold evil—jealousy,
And hate, infestering all the bliss of love,
Suspicions, peepings, passion of revenge—
Ay, ofttimes murder, making red the hands,
As mine are red with the innocent faithful blood.

BATHSHEBA.

My *lord !*

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DAVID.

Arise, what dost thou at my feet?
For I am but a worm.

BATHSHEBA.

Mine, mine the sin,
All mine. Thou hast no fleck upon those hands,
Nor on thy life one stain . . . My lord, my *god!* . .
I crave no word of pity—not one word—
Forgiveness, none. Ah lord, I am not worthy
To lick the dust that thou hast spurned away.
Only have mercy on thyself, and take
This sinful body, foul, abominable,
And set thy hand amid the hair, and hurl it
Out of thy sight for ever,—knowing only
I die all happy, unreluctant victim,
Blood-sacrifice for thee—for thee—my love!—
That thou mayest win once more God's smile—
once more!

DAVID.

Thou dear, true-hearted, trustful, perfect child,
Blessed among the daughters of the earth

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For ever! Rise. O, talk no more of blood!
God knows my hands are red, red, red enough,
And my heart's burthen heavy enough. Lift thou
Thy gentle eyes; with sweet forgiveness lift
Thy gentle eyes. We fell—*mine* was the sin,
Self-multiplying crime on deadly crime,
Defying the just God upon His throne:
And the realm suffers, and the world. And now,
If death could right this evil, we might die,
Drinking the dear oblivion of long sleep,
The virtuous man's reward at welcome close
Of his day's honest toil. But this not ours—
Not till the pitiless years with pain on pain
Slow-moving trample out these lingering fires.
For let no criminal believe that death,
Dealt at his asking, or the self-drawn dagger,
Can wipe away his sin, or mortise up
The beauty he hath shattered on the earth;
Cowardly, shrinking from his deeds' recoil,
And all the sequent anguish. *Life* for him,
Not death. Life with its haunting dreams,
The sleepless pillow, the phantasmal births

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Of horrible darkness, conscience never still,
Remorse and fear, the loveless brows of men,
The hatred and the loathing of the world.
And for *us* life, amid the scoffs and grins
Of mean men and of fools, the hypocrite's
Upbraiding palms, the gentler soul's sad smile,
Or tear, or blush of sympathetic shame—
A keener sting; long trouble of the breast,
Regrets and chill forebodings, nightly dread,
And of my might the all-visible decay;
Till earth behold how sure from gulfs of sin
Man may arise and purify his soul
Through the unbounded mercy of his God:
While slowly with long labour we uprear
Some little work of good, to render less
The inexorable ill—but ne'er outweigh.
This can repentance do, but stay not ever
Sin's mass precipitate loosed upon the world,
Which, like the sun-split snow from mountain-fields,
Rolls ruining, and hurling as it rolls
Ruin on ruin new. Alas, alas,
Bathsheba!

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BATHSHEBA.

O that I were back again
In the innocent days, that at my sin's first motion
I might set foot upon it, trample it,
Strive with it! . . Yet I strove . . . Ah loving God,
I cried to Thee in conflict, but my faith
Failed me; the passion flooding to my lips
Sighed but its own desire! I had no strength,
No help, no safeguard of a fairer love,
No guide: and ah, the *sweet* wherewith I strove!

DAVID.

And I too strove. But love, once let within
Through open doors, what hand can stay or slay?
It grows by its repression, as the wheat
Trodden of sheep, as fire athwart the winds.
All chances feed it or inflame,—delay,
Baffled endeavour, absence, jealousy,
Sweet, sweet return, the mutual mystic want;
On which, if one would liberate his soul,
Come honour, pity, tenderness, remorse;
Passion's revival, dread fatality

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Of thraldom, headlong driftings on the wave;
Horror of rival touches, tearing up
The senses and the soul, pride of possession,
The grudging of the coveted delight;
And if the eye's bliss fail, the spirit's fervour;
And if the spirit languish, the eye's joy;
Incentive stepping in incentive's place,
New force on force exhaustless in reserve—
No respite. And against all these I fought,
Wasting my manhood, dwarfing every deed,
Oblivious of my kingdom and my foes,—
Then yielded. Then I deemed the Veiled Will
Down the long flood had borne me, and I lay
Believing from the sin's dark womb would spring,
Then, or thereafter in the far-off years,
Good unforeseen. What good hath followed? Ah,
Wave upon wave breaks over me—the worst
Hath been not yet!

BATHSHEBA.

O that we twain had died upon thy sword,
To save the world this sorrow and this sin!

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DAVID.

Yet very sweet it was, a dear delight,
Soul leaning upon soul, eyes from sure eyes
And lips from lips drawing the heart's best love.
What would a man not do to taste for once
The utmost good of earth? . . Ay, what have I
Done! . . I would drink a deadlier draught of pain
Than all this shame, disaster, rout of purpose,
Poor lamb, if I might set thee in thy fields
Free with thy natural innocence again.
Ah, think not of thy woes apart from mine,
Or of thy life as lonely! Lo, my strength
I consecrate to thee; deep, silent love,
Love unforgetting, as becomes a man,
Is thine, with all these thews—thine, keenliest hurt
And sorest wounded of all lives my hands
Have darkened—thine, until the mist of death
Glasses these eyeballs, and these baneful palms
Lie curled in icy slumber.

BATHSHEBA.

What am I,

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To claim this of thee? I am well content,
Favoured above all women of all lands,
With thee to perish, ever thy worst wound
To nurse as mine. O that my heart's endurance
Might bear thee solace on thy darkened earth!
Then would I brook all sorrow, scorn, disdain,
The world's hard hate, the pangs of memory,
Without one sigh.

DAVID.

Out, out from Eden-gates
The fiery-sworded cherubim of Heaven
Adam, the first of sinful men, and Eve,
Our mother, drave, to toil in bitter fields,
To sow, to reap, to die, with perfumes sweet
Of Paradise blown to their leafless homes:
So have we fallen; so shall we endure
Chill rain, and branding beams, and nightly frost,
Sickness, and death of children, pain and care,
Unsevered, each by each in love sustained.
May, like dry leaves, these palms be burnt in fire,

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If I fail from thee! Let the wild wolf rend
With greedy fangs the heart from out my breast,
Ere I forsake thee! Yea, thy wrongs shall turn
To fruit of perfect peace amid the world,
And o'er wide earth the peoples bless thy name.
May the great God lend power to endure!

BATHSHEBA.

O, may He lift thee in thy righteous days
Yet higher, working out a vaster good!

DAVID.

Hark, hark! what sound of sorrow shakes the air?

VOICES (*without*).

Whither, O whither, for Thy world what fate?
O God, we cry to Thee!
Poor sightless, handless, inarticulate
Wind-stricken fools, that wail and wait
Thy doom, nor know what is or what shall be,
Out, out, alone, adrift upon Thy pitiless sea.

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DAVID.

It is the burthen of a song that grows
Familiar to mine ear . . Ho, Lokman! slaves! . .
The dream that ever doth revisit me
In sorrow, borne on every vague alarm,
Lies heavy on me now . . .

LOKMAN *and* SERVANTS *enter in agitation.*

What stubborn truth
Comes closed in that dim dirge, that strikes like death
Knocking upon the heart? . . Thou 'rt grey as dust,
And tremble thy pale lips. Fear not. Reveal.

LOKMAN.

The worst that can be is. Yea, Absalom,
Gathering his rebel brood at Hebron, sounds
A trumpet in the hills, and with fierce face
Marches against thy very towers, O King!

DAVID.

Call out my Gibborim, and arm the gates . . .
Ay, have I drowsed indeed? . . O treachery! . .

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Summon my captains; seek my counsellors;
Bring me my armour; rouse ye Joab; call
Amasa, Abishai, Benaiah. Hence,

[LOKMAN *and others go.*

And draw my household home . . .

JOAB *enters.*

What, hast thou slept,
Joab; or if a slumber snared my brain,
Didst thou stand mocking by?

JOAB.

Alas, not slept,
Save duly in the night, wherein foul plots
Break from the egg, and dark conspiracies
Crawl like the yelping jackals to the gate.
The honest man, scorning suspicion, yields

ABISHAI, BENAIAH, HUSHAI, *and* ABIATHAR *enter.*

The knave the vantage. We have striven and failed;

ATTENDANTS *of* BATHSHEBA *and many of the Household enter.*

And now to grapple with a full-fledged ill.

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DAVID.

Benaiah, Abishai, Abiathar . . .
Where is Amasa?

BENAIAH.

Ask me not, my King,
Lest haply I should wrong so brave a man:
I know not—let the word be still, I know not:
He is not here: the world is all confused:
His was a valiant soul: and there an end.

DAVID.

What sayest thou? Amasa too! Amasa!
He errs not from the heart; if not in judgment,
Then have the good intents of all my days
Shot far awry; then that I wisdom deemed
Was in the Land poor folly. Base hath been
My best endeavour in Amasa's eye,
If from my love hath swerved Amasa's heart. . .
[*To* HUSHAI.] Hushai, what horror struggles with thy soul?

HUSHAI.

Ay me, pluck out my tongue when I have told!

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Ahitophel is linked in foul alliance
With thy rebellious son. All, all, all false!

MEN.

O sudden-breaking earthquake in the realm,
Yawning to gulf the great laborious deeds
Wherewith a righteous arm hath made us blest!

GAD (*entering*).

The ravenous crowd, clamouring about the streets,
Cry, Absalom the Just! and not one hand
Is lifted up to strike them on the lips.

DAVID.

Which of you from the quiver of fell truth
Can draw yet one more shaft to pierce my soul?
Will not my soldiers fight? Jerusalem
Stand faithful? Wherefore hide ye so your eyes? . .
What! not the city! Ye, will ye, too, fail me?

ABISHAI.

At thy right hand I will abide, O King,
Though all men else forsake thee!

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BENAIAH.

Not alone.
Take all this life can yield thee to the end.

JOAB.

And this, until thine enemies be dust.

DAVID.

Ye three! In thy dense homes, Jerusalem,
Three faithful men! Oh, there 's no darker sin
In all the tangled evils of the earth
Than the forgetting of a love once warm!
Thee never dealt I hurt, Jerusalem,
If drenched with slaying. Poor I found thee, frail,
A nameless nothing. I have set thy towers
Prouder among the cities under heaven
Than Zidon or Damascus; yea, thy name,
Murmured around the limits of the world,
Will be a sweetness on the lips of men;
And they will sigh for thee, and bow the head
Far off toward thy gates, and for thy love

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Languish, and seek thee over sunless seas.
But with thy glory to the last dread hour
Be this remembered—God's Anointed King
Thou hast rejected, in his heaviest hour
Mocked, and in sorrows driven his weary head
Out shelterless! . . Now is my cup nigh full.

WOMEN.

O beauteous tower, strong tower of Israel,
Cast down and broken! Where shall we find rest?
O piteous close of happiest, sweetest days!
O our dark hearts and desolate, lorn lives!

MEN.

An end of every sound of mirth, an end,
An end of fair aspiring deeds and dreams,
An end, an end of joyful brotherhood,
Triumphant arms, wide-gleaming victories,
Glory that made the throne of Israel
Beam like one sun-smit diamond! Woe! woe! woe!

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TAMAR (*breaking suddenly into the midst*).

Ay, weep and mourn: mourn, mourn, and wring
your hands!
Hath he not well avenged my wrong, my wrong?
O Absalom, my brother! Which of you
Pitied me? . . Cruel, merciless, false father,
Insensate King! I was thy daughter: well,
Couldst thou not cherish thy poor daughter's
honour,
Even for pity? Lo, as dark a fall
Awaited thee! Drink, drink thy sorrows dry!
[ATTENDANTS *offer to restrain her.*

DAVID.

Suffer her, friends, in silence; mine the pain.

TAMAR.

Ay, ye would set your palms across my mouth
Now, if ye might! But ye shall scape no stroke.
What canst thou boast, with all thy marriage vows,
O woman of the wise ethereal mien?
Thou, childless in thy guilt as I in shame!

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DAVID.

Ah child, if thou couldst feel my soul's dread
pangs,
Then wouldst thou know thy hurt avenged indeed!

TAMAR.

And you, ye virtuous women! O just Heaven!
There was not one of you with heart more
clean
Than this all putrid body. Out upon you!
Ye know no mercy for a sister fallen,
Though she be innocent as cradled babes.
Ye worship the betrayer in his strength,
And curse his helpless prey. O death! O death!
Now hath your sorrow come upon your souls,
Suddenly in the night, sudden as mine!..
Thou hast done warily, O Absalom!..
Heap agony on agony, just God!

ABIATHAR.

O, mix not with thy fierce and violent wrath
His name whose anger causeless cannot fall!

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TAMAR.

O, by this body, spoilt of all life's joys;
By these poor barren breasts, so shrunk, so dead,
That never felt, nor shall, the dear, dear lips
Of tender babes thrust hard for precious life,
Nor warmth of little limbs; by all my wealth
Of womanhood spilt, wasted on the earth;
By my soul's incommunicable woe,
My pure affection slain, my lonely hours,
I curse you! . . Touch me not . . . My days are few!
I go to seek my narrow earthy bed,
So pure, so cold, so dreamless: pain and shame,
Sorrow and hopeless longing, waste away
The flesh that is our beauty and our bane
Quickly enow; their work is well nigh done.
Go ye your ways, and God make desolate
Your houses in the Land for evermore! [*Passes out.*

DAVID.

Alas, through many a poor unhonoured mouth
God speaks in wrath; and mine iniquity

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Goes not unpunished: lo, the judgment falls!
Out, out into the deserts! let no foot
Cling to the threshold, ye whose hearts, yet true,
Cleave to your king! I will not yield my life
Or yours in bondage to the rebel slaves.
I will not tarry here to spill dear blood
In hopeless war . . . O God, Thy hand is stretched
To drive me forth! O Father, O my Father,
Teach me to bear with patient heart Thy will!

MEN AND WOMEN.

O pain, pain, pain! O sorrow never failing,
Hope that for one short hour may fold no wing!

BATHSHEBA.

O agony! O vision! Her dread words
Abide with me, and mix with this great woe,
As evil dreams, not of us, after night
Like conscience haunt and sting. Ah! I behold
Far in the cloven chasms of rolling cloud
One with the King's brow, crowned in mockery,
And lifted in the sight of angry men;

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And sadly on my face his tranquil eyes
Resting; and, "Mother, mother," from his lips
Sighs like sad winds wailing around the earth!
Ah King! Ah child! Ah glory of the world!
Ah darkness, darkness dropt o'er all the realm!

DAVID.

O Javeh, Father, wherefore hast thou turned
Thy face from me forsaken? . . Lend me strength
To bear this misery without one cry!

ALL.

O baffled world, flung back in thine endeavour,
Whose strife is vain!
O sin that still must be, and bear for ever
Dead fruits of pain!
Take, take us to your deeps, O desert lands,
Fit grave for homeless feet, and sinful, weary hands!

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SCENE IV. *Jerusalem. A House-top overlooking the entrance to the* KING'S *Palace.*

MICHAL *and* TAMAR.

TAMAR.

THUS, thus, e'en thus, upon thine arm, dear friend,
Sustain me. I will see them pass the gates.
I will replenish my poor lamp of life
Once more in their great pain—sweet, very sweet!

MICHAL.

Stand close. It is the bond of common hate,
Strong as the bond of love, that holds us twain
In this strange miserable union bound,
Forlorn companions: yet a something here
Of motherhood or sister pity wells
Toward thee. So: thy poor, pale hand in mine.

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TAMAR.

Now let them pass, and I will move nor lip
Nor eyelid, or in triumph or regret.

MICHAL.

My founts of tears, with drought of love, are dried;
My very hate is dull and passionless.

TAMAR.

Ha! hear'st thou not their lamentation now?

MICHAL.

The women, that can never hide their hearts,
Or bind their passions home, except with rent
And ravage of their being, theirs the cry.
Alas, 't is piteous!

TAMAR.

See the gates thrown back!
Ah, ah, behold them come! Lo, Hushai there,
Grey counsellor! lo, Joab, Abishai,
Benaiah!

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MICHAL.

Calm, with solemn faces proud,
Set as for hopeless battle.

TAMAR.

Lo, the priests ! . .
The King, the King ! Aha, his proud head bare,
His feet unsandalled—humbled to the ground
In his great shame !

MICHAL.

Let us go down.

TAMAR.

Not yet . .
The women now !

MICHAL.

Let us go down, I pray . .
Ah, ah, thou very god of my poor soul,
Since first the passionate heat of eager love
Throbbed out its palpitating beams to thee,
In womanhood's new summer ; perfect strength
And grace and tenderness of fearless youth,

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And manly beauty breathing fervid love,
As the warm roses perfume breathe in air,
Haunting my sense in sunlight or in sleep,
My love was my worst sin! I loved thee, lord,
For my own joy too meanly; would have bent
To *my* ways all thy power and all thy dream,
Ay, hated thee for love's sake, stung to madness
With jealousy—a mean, a narrow soul.
Thy judgment was all just. Yet had my love
Been wayward, wandering, dazed with other eyes,
I had not hurt thee thus. Ah God! ah God!
In this dread humiliation I behold
Thy glory: never smaller soul could bear
With that majestic patient calm thy pain.
Thy ways are all unknown to souls like mine.
Could not I love and yet not comprehend?
And yet, the dark, the jealous heart abides.
I see thy ruin; and mine eyes are dry.
Go, go to thy life's fall! on to thy doom!

TAMAR.

It is enough, it is enough. Come down;

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I have seen all. O, help my poor faint limbs
Back to their lonely bed, and let me die!

MICHAL.

Let us go down together to our deaths,
I have no hope, or joy, or need of living:
And what are we, to drink the gracious air
When all these perish?—All is over now.

[*They descend.*

VOICES (*from the streets far off.*)

Once more renew thyself, O Israel!
Put on clean raiment, gird thyself for joy.
Let go the olden system; it is spent.
Rulers are but as are the workman's tools—
The axe to hew the bough, then cast away;
The plane to smooth and shape, then cast away;
The knife to carve and fashion, and lay by;
And each fulfils his part, and so an end.
Then welcome, welcome, welcome, Absalom!
Welcome new hopes, and unexhausted sway!

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SCENE V. *The Summit of Mount Olivet.*

ISRAELITES *approaching, are heard in lamentation.*

IN Thy tents we bode, and we were blest,
Father, and free;
Till we wearied of Thy palms and breast,
Wrestling with Thee;
Thee, Immortal, shunned for mortal king—
Saul; and his might
Lifted us, and bore us on wide wing,
Soaring in light,
Days long. But proud the spirit of man, and vain,
Wayward his hand;
Blind in agony Saul strove, with pain
Heaving the Land;
All the black rebellion of our soul
From his lips brake;
Rebel king of rebel slaves, his dole
Borne for our sake.

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Then the righteous King arose—ah, woe!
  David, our lord!
Fallen, fallen, fallen, and brought low!
  Now by Thy sword
Shattered, and in his hurt our holiest deed
  And purpose rent;
He bleeding for and by us, as we bleed,
  Sickened and spent!
All hope gone down in darkness, as the day
Fails, as we wander in the bitter way
Once more, out-driven, seeking far in vain
The promised good unfound, the rest we ne'er
    attain!

DAVID *moves up, his head uncovered, his feet bare: with him,* HUSHAI; JOAB; ABIATHAR; ZADOK; BATHSHEBA, *and* WOMEN, *her* ATTENDANTS; ABISHAI; BENAIAH; ADONIJAH; SHEPHATIAH; ITHREAM; JONATHAN; AHIMAAZ; PRIESTS; LEVITES, *carrying the Ark;* ITTAI; ZIBA; CAPTAINS; GIBBORIM; ISRAELITE WARRIORS; GITTITES; A CONCOURSE OF THE PEOPLE.

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DAVID.

Halt here, and stint, a moment, your sad cries.
Abiathar and Zadok, O my friends
Well-tried, my old companions, surely now
Ye do an ill thing, bearing thus in fear
The symbol of God's presence with the People
Out from the Kingdom's heart away. Return,
Therefore, and in the home these hands up-
reared—
Alas, in what dear days and with what hope!—
Rest ye the Ark, and by it there abide,
Nor make a mockery of all my deeds.

[ABIATHAR, ZADOK, *and* LEVITES *with the Ark, turn back.*

And, Hushai, be thy path as thou hast chosen:
Back to Jerusalem, and with what skill
God yields, to counsel counsel fair oppose;
Draw if thou canst the fierce insatiate soul
Back to my bosom, that this troublous cloud
Melt like a dream away. But, O, I charge thee
Before this people and before thy God,
Deal gently with my son; nor let thy wiles

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Draw down one flake of sorrow on his head!

[HUSHAI *turns back.*

Ahimaaz and Jonathan! ye twain
Attend him, and the harvest of my hopes
Bear after to the land whither I go.

[JONATHAN *and* AHIMAAZ *turn back.*

Ziba, since never yet the mean heart bare
Gratitude irkless—nay, but hates the hand
Of help, and feeds remembrance like a grudge;
And he, thy lord, who in my mightier hour
Crawled at my feet, and grovelled for a boon,
Now heaves his head, I will no more contend—
Thou and Mephibosheth divide the land . .
Go—speak not . . thanks! What knowest *thou* of thanks? . . [ZIBA *goes.*
But Ittai, valiant Ittai, wherefore thou,
A stranger in this tortured Israel,
Drink voluntary pain, with these thy friends,
And, for my sin, like misery endure?
Take, for love's sake, thy freedom; and may God
Requite thee, for thy love was sweet as dew!

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ITTAI.

Not so, my King; for save with thee I go,
Nor hope, nor peace, nor freedom shall I find.
Thy glory was my glory, and thy griefs
Are my griefs. Other dream be never mine.

DAVID.

Out of the lips of strangers shall I find
Comfort? Mine own forget me in my pangs! . .
[*Turns towards Jerusalem.*] Woe, woe, woe unto
thee, Jerusalem!
Beautiful bride, false as a harlot, thou
For whose sole love my heart through years of pain
Spent all its substance labouring—out upon thee,
Foul traitorous wife, stealthful adulteress,
With all thy shameless beauty bared to heaven,
Drunk, and thy garments dyed with purple blots
Of nightly sin and wine drained in the dark!
Ah, beautiful yet in sin, and all my soul
Clings to thee in revolt; ay, though the wounds
Of thy dark dagger inly gape and bleed!
So fair, so foul, with all thy glory of limbs

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Wantoned before the altars of thy God!
Thrice heavier shall be thy curse than that
Which makes my name a darkness in the world;
Thrice heavier thy pangs; thrice heavier
And sorelier vext thy heart than this that once
Bore all the hopes of Israel, and now
Breaks with the burthen of the Land's despair!
Cursëd be thou that from thy breast hast driven
The Christ, the Christ of God! So shall thy light
Darken, and all thy beauty like a leaf
Shrivel away; and ribalds mock thee, fools
Sway thee!.. But you, ye fierce white wildernesses,
[*Turning towards the hills of Judah.*] Billowing
in fire, far to the rosy hills
Of Moab, Judah's deathful heritage,
Draw me within you, with a heart as torn
And desolate as yonder grey ravines,
Bare goblets brimmed with the keen blaze of heaven,
All beauty scorched away; dead as yon mirror
Of sulphurous slime, wherein the raging sun
Stares at his eyes of flame! Familiar realms,
Haunts of my lone lone agony gone over,

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In the dead years that back in memory
Throng with a tenfold awful meaning now,
When like a hunted bird, or hound, or deer,
Without one drop of water for my lips,
I fled before the dark relentless king—
Ah, with a heart in hope, how free, how strong,
To bear the pain, with so much sweet beyond!—
Home of my houseless youth, my body's grave,
Cast out, forlorn, dishonoured as I am,
Forsaken of my people and my God,
Take me shame-blasted, back into your chasms!

ISRAELITES.

Surely the agonies of such a soul
Are deadlier than the strife of storms or seas.
O, that the Land had perished ere this pain!

DAVID.

What, are ye weeping yet? Weep not for me.
It is the just requital of my guilt—
None other. It is welcome. Weep no more.
Let us be gone. What boots delaying now?

[*The whole multitude moves down the mountain.*

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SCENE VI. *Bahurim.*

SHIMEI *and* BENJAMITES.

SHIMEI.

LAY ye your ears unto the ground, and hear.
Aha, is 't not the trampling of their feet?
And hark that wail dying upon the air!
Lo, now, the spears that bicker in the sun!
They come, thick-thronging down the olive-wood.
Stand ye apart . . . I thank thee, gracious God! . .
[*Runs up the hill-side.*
Behold the King, behold the mighty King! . .
Where is thy glory, where thy triumph now? . .
DAVID *and the* MULTITUDE *pass downward.*
Hear me, thou, David, King of Israel!
Who took thee from the sheepfolds, from the lambs,
From the sleek heifers and the he-goats, down
From thy grey mountain took thee, from the pens

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And wattled folds, the pits and water-troughs,
A ragged shepherd, leading thy few sheep,
And couching with the herds? Who for thy crook
Gave thee clean arms, and for thy cloak of patches
Garments of purple and fine linen? Who
For thy rock-bed upon the hill-side gave thee
Soft pillows to thy rough unturbaned head? . .
A dog had shown fairer remembrance. Down,
Pestilent wolf, foul jackal of the night,
Ravenous beast of prey!

DAVID.

What man art thou?

SHIMEI.

Knowest me not? Smellest thou not so near
The blood of Saul? Yea, has thy glut of flesh
So deadened thy keen nostrils? Shimei
Am I, Saul's kin, thy king's, come out to curse thee,
That thou mayest learn how thou art fallen indeed!
Out, coffin-rat! out, kite! out, carrion maw!

[*Casts stones at him.*

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JOAB.

Will the King suffer this—not slay?

ABISHAI.

Dishonour
More keen than death! What, hath the King no shame?
It is not meet that this dishonour fall
Before the people. Fie!

SHIMEI.

Wilt not look up?
Coward! Wilt match me with the sword? the spear?
The knife? Wilt wrestle on the level mead?

ABISHAI.

My King, if thou hast water in thy veins,
Behold thy servant keeps a blushful face.
Command me, for the People's love, to mount,
And cleave this traitor's mazard to the gums.

JOAB.

Surely we suffer hurt in this thy shame!

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DAVID.

Bide ye. Put up thy sword. Ye idle whifflers,
And evermore presumptuous, brood of rebels,
Know I not mine own honour? He 's i' the right.
Let him rail on. Not yours the shame, not yours.
Ay, it is fit I hear my ruin mouthed
By filthy lips, on every highway sung,
And drink the scorn of madmen and of slaves.
Come not between me and the ire of God.

SHIMEI.

Ha! go thou down, go to thy burning grave,
Dark plotter of the night, subtle supplanter,
Remorseless victor, disinheritor
Of thy best friends' lorn children! May thy children
No less supplant thee! Viler be thy death
Than Saul's or Jonathan's; and on the rock
The ravening birds with their foul beaks devour,
Tearing, thy sinews and thy veins, their claws
Rooted about thy ribs. They brookt no shame
Like thine: for they died valiant, and at war;
But thou in thy great fear fleëst thy foe.

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DAVID.

What were my hope, O Father, if Thy ways
Were hard as man's, and equal Thy revenge?

[*They pass down.*

SCENE VII. *Jerusalem. A Chamber in the* KING'S *Palace.*

ABSALOM, AHITOPHEL, HUSHAI.

AHITOPHEL.

I AM for peace. Remaining, thou art king.
Rest till the People—daily thee beholding
In royal guise within thy father's walls;
His servants thine; the functions of a king
Hourly fulfilled; each office of the state
Firm tenanted by masters of thy choice;
All renovations, alterings of the law,
Wrought silently; the empire in its might
Strong as of old; and he in his exile—

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Forget the sudden earthquake that hath hurled
Him down, and thee exalted in his seat,
And hold thee blameless, and thy deed divine.
Custom is nature's potent ministress,
Ofttimes coëqual nature; stronger she
Than prejudice or anger, wounds or grief;
Sin's sanctioner, dread usurpation's seal;
Give her a space to make complete thy sway.
Rest, and let grow.

HUSHAI.

This counsel I oppose.
I have not in his utmost need forsaken
A ruined king to speed another's fall.
Lo, thou hast spat suspicion on my love:
Hear now, and judge between us. If my words
With what thou knowest of the King accord,
Then is my counsel shrewder of the twain.
So, then. Hath David ever to this hour
From danger shrunk, or pain, or strokes of death?
Art thou a stronger power, a surer arm,
Than Ammonite, or Philistine, or Saul

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In his fell rage, or Zobah's venturous king?
Art thou, my lord, in battle David's peer,
Thy generals apt as his? When hath Amasa
Out-mastered Joab? Subtle is thy father,
Well-skilled and subtle, long in battle tried,
Quick-eyed, quick-handed, making every flaw
His need's advantage, keen to read his foe.
Nor have the People wholly ceased to love him.
Tarry?—But give him time to scheme, and these
Time for regret, affection's refluence,
And suddenly, at midnight, thou shalt hear
His trumpet, and, behold, thou 'rt hedged about
With spears, in laughter, helpless in thy sloth,
And the King prospers, and thy hope 's o'erthrown!

AHITOPHEL.

Surely he speaketh reasonable words,
But folly at the heart. The King is weak,
Forsaken: purpose of revenge in him
Abides not: he is broken: he is spent . . .
Nay? . . Well, if war *be* in the wind, what then?
Provoke not *thou* the battle, but await.

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Gather thy hosts together silently;
Train them and wield until they answer thee
Swift as the sword that flickers in thy hand.
Make strong thy gates against aggression; man
Thy walls, and set thy sentinels on ear.
Thy polity meanwhile make whole within:
All growths of old authority's decay
Cut out, the grafts of healthier justice gird;
And whatsoe'er of good is left undone
Accomplish; whatsoe'er of ill befel—
Either from languor in the King, events
Thwarting, or imperfections of the man
Borne out in act, as passions in the eye—
Wholly expunge. These honest arts attend
With craftier, by occasion rendered fit.
Use subtle means to wean away his friends;
Flatter thy foes; be facile to forgive,
When by forgiveness thou canst make foes friends.
So shall the city as a brave man armed
In proof impenetrable stand, without
By arms, within through peaceful union, strong
Against whatever foe thy gates assails.

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HUSHAI.

See thou, already hath he bated ground!
"Haply the King *may* come. 'T were like King
David.
Make strong thy gates, and tarry, *lest* he come!"
What if thy dread revealed thy purpose foil?
What if the People deem thee faint at heart,
A dallier and a dolt? What if the King—
Time thine, time his—outstrip thee in the craft
Of war's swift preparation? . . Tarry! Nay,
Down, down upon him when his hands are faint,
And yet his people waver in their loves,
And choose nor him nor thee. Foresee the thrust,
And thrust ere arm be lifted: this is war,
This is the art that shows the general wise.

AHITOPHEL.

I grant aggression oft aggression's foil:
But here aggression were a twofold ill.
First, the compassion (subtle, swift ally)
Which thine unfilial, fierce, and hot assay
Will rouse in souls now stagnant. Next, thy danger:

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Risk not thy life against a desperate foe. . .
Nay, then, if so the freedom of the King
Thou fearest, for the easing of thy soul
Spare me from all thy host ten thousand spears,
And I, even I, pursuing through the night,
Will come upon King David, unawares,
Take captive, bear him honourably home,
Press from his mouth the pardon of thy deeds,
Yea, and thy kingship through his lips proclaim.
Thus shall thy fear be quieted, an end
Made without blood or battle, thy young palms
Before the Land be stainless, and the King
In voluntary act doubly undone.

HUSHAI.

A fair song easily sung. And will the King
Creep lightly, think ye, to the trapper's hand,
Or bide the casting of the fisher's net?
E'en so! Him whom the bloody-handed Saul,
Through months on months pursuing, failed to find,
Ahitophel shall capture in a night!
Knowest thou the desert hills as David knows?

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Canst count the caves of Judah? Nay, I doubt not
That even now within some hollow rock,
Deep in the dells, he hideth; while afar
His emissaries, skirring through the Land,
Arouse the People for wide-ruining war.
Only the trumpet brays him from his earth.
Let not this greybeard mock thee, my young lord.

ABSALOM.

There! . . I have heard ye twain, old both, both wise.
Spake not ye both of danger? War for me,
War, war! No lolling in voluptuous laps,
No pillowed ease! The tents, the clanging fields,
Far-sweeping conquest, as befits a king!
Shall I, the warlike David's armed foe,
Supplant his rule, not rivalling his deeds?

AHITOPHEL.

Nay, but, my lord, . .

A MESSENGER *enters.*

ABSALOM.

Peace! . . . What fell gift hast *thou?*

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MESSENGER.

My King, alas! 't is evil, yet not all
Evil. Thy sister Tamar grieves no more.

ABSALOM.

Dead, sayest thou? . . Poor, darling blossom spoilt!
Ah, ah! my heart 's one tender love all over! . .
Dead, dead!—not dead!

ALL.

Alas, alas, my lord!

ABSALOM.

My sister, it is well with thee, all well . . .
But what for *me?* . . Ha! see ye this? . . What now? . .
What will ye now? . . Who counsels me to peace
Now? Which of you will bid me sheathe my sword,
Not rise and loose the anguish of my heart
In slaughter desolating? . . Out to battle!
And if I die, what then? . . No wife will close
Mine eyelids: no sweet sister wail forlorn.

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AHITOPHEL.

Nay, but, my lord and King, though just their wrath,
Shall kings obey the passion of their souls,
To jeopardize their people?

HUSHAI.

Nay, 't is well.
Happy the land whose tide of bitter needs
Runs with the tempest of its ruler's rage.
O, on to thy revenge, the Land's salvation!

AHITOPHEL.

Stay, stay, my King, my lord! . .

ABSALOM.

Delay me not.
Gather my hosts, and pour we on my foes!
By this one battle let me rise or fall!

AHITOPHEL.

Ah, my young lord, but send me not to die
All unforgiven! I have loved thee well,
Left all for thee,—my home, my goodly fame,

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My king, all for the Kingdom's sake and thine.
And now this danger!—If my mouth offends,
Alas, forgive the error of my love!

ABSALOM.

Why, friend, I owe thee nought but thanks, clear
thanks.
Forgive thee!—Nay, forgive my petulant words,
And all my youth's hot anger. If I come
A king indeed from battle, thou shalt be
Still honoured. If I fall, in honour bear
My memory! Farewell!.. Come, faithful friend!

[ABSALOM *and* HUSHAI *go.*

AHITOPHEL.

Traitor, ah traitor! Well hast thou prevailed,
Playing upon the frailty of his soul.
Ay, that which for his good I had appeased,
Thou for his ruin heavest into storm.
... Dotard! Is this the king that I have chosen
To plant where thou thy lordly boughs hast spread,
O David, wider than the terebinths

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Of Mamre, yielding shelter for the flocks
Huddled from storm? Ah, but said I, the tree
Is hollowed out, and any blast of heaven
May snap it from the roots: away with it:
This sapling yet may yield a safer shade.
Fool, fool! . . And now the error of my days
Falls not on my head only—nay, on thine,
O youth; and thine, my King; and thine,
O People; and mine eager hand upraised
For one fair common good, itself hath wrought
Worse ill than that it strove with. For this deed
Is the beginning of unending griefs—
Children with fathers, people with their kings,
King against king, and tribe with tribe at war—
Thus shall thy glory cease, O Israel!
Thy little hour of might and hope is spent.
Therefore for me no life for evermore—
No life! Few days at best for this grey head,
But each one heavier than my heart can bear.
What wilt thou do, Ahitophel, where turn,
Where wander? . . . Honour? From thy poor struck
palms

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What honour, luckless youth, for any now? . .
Wilt thou go back to David? Wilt thou say,
"My lord, these hands have wrought thy kingdom hurt,
Dishonoured thee, led death into thy house,
Dislinked thy people; take me home forgiven?"
Wilt thou go forth among the desolate,
And justify their griefs? . . . Blank, vacant world,
Bare rock and desert sands in keen fierce day
Limitless, lengthening out, and out, and out,
Utterly void, wherein, a lonely man,
I wander friendless, old—this is my life!
All joy, and honour, all the faith of friends,
All love, all help, all hope, dead, dead, dead, dead!

[*Passes out.*

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ACT IV.

SCENE I. *At the Gates of Mahanaim.*

DAVID, *seated;* BARZILLAI; SHOBI; CHIMHAM; JONATHAN; ATTENDANTS.

DAVID.

STRANGERS, yet friends; aged Barzillai,
And you, all-faithful, Shobi, Jonathan,
Now, till this lingering hour of dread be past—
This hour so darkened with the wings of death,
And sick imagination mingling up
The doom of Tamar and the gathering woes
Of battle and the peril of my son—
I pray you stand beside me—near—all near;
I need the solace sweet of human love,
The touch, and breath, and warmth of living men.

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BARZILLAI.

Before our souls forsake thee, O my King,
Yon mount shall crumble to the level mead.

DAVID.

By this, I know, the battle 's at its height,
And the beast's blood-thirst in the Tribes awake.
My kingdom 's rent asunder, all my toil
Frayed out, the carven image of my dream
Of beauty thrown and trampled in the dust.
Can it be well with us, and well with him?

BARZILLAI.

It shall be well with thine, my lord and King,
Scattering thine enemies like the leaves.

DAVID.

Be well
With mine! All, all are mine, Barzillai, all:
Whate'er betide, no victory for me
That doth not leave me vanquished—here—e'en
here—

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Smitten and trodden in the tenderest sore.
All, all are mine, all dear. O, would to God
I had not yielded to your tongues, but now
Stood where the waving of this royal arm
Might stay the battle ! . . Ours the victory,
For ours the dexterous leaders, and the few
Long trained, and tractable, the patient skill
Out-numbering numbers; ours the victory—
But there, there, there the doubt, the dread, the
pain !
What can such triumph profit? Miserable
Hurt of my people, wrenching of their pride,
Dark desolation of the kindred breast,
Seed sown of interneciary strife
For years on years ! No fire can burn this clean.

SHOBI.

But fear not for him. Didst thou not command
All should deal tenderly with him? What then?

DAVID.

Ay, ay, I did *command !* [*Falls musing.*

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JONATHAN (*to* SHOBI).

Seest thou two little clouds of lifted dust,
Dashed from the plain, and moving in the sun?

SHOBI.

Where?

JONATHAN.

Yonder, where the nubk is thin of spears,
And the rock glistens. See you? Dust like smoke.

SHOBI.

Nay, I see nothing save the rippled heat
Dancing like water; and mine eyes are dazed.

JONATHAN.

Surely, 't is two men running hitherward
With tidings from the field.

SHOBI.

Mute be thy mouth,
Nor with new expectation trouble him.

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A GILEADITE *passes, leading a lamb by a cord.*

DAVID.

Friend, for the sacred love of gentleness,
Lead with a lighter hand thy poor, forlorn,
And helpless prey. Nay, whither—to what death?

GILEADITE.

Unto the altar, O dread lord!

DAVID.

E'en so! . .
'T is common; yet it wrings my heart with grief,
Makes breathing hard, relaxes every limb . . .
Come hither. Drop the cord upon the earth . . .
Poor youngling, with thy glossy, tufted brow,
And thy mild mouth, and yearning eyes—I love thee . . .
Look here upon this frail child of the hills,
This stricken, helpless, lost, and wildered lamb.
Thus have ye led me staggering to my doom,

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Me, for this wayward stubborn Israel
Blood-offering, bearing up their sins to God—
Not pure, not innocent, as this, indeed,
Save in my love of Israel, all pure—
Ay, spotless as this silken fleece of snow,
And guileless as the heart within this breast.
For without shedding of the innocent blood
There is no life for man. Poor wistful fool,
Yoke-mates are we in sorrow, thou and I! . .
O Israel, if ever I forgat thee,
May these twain hands drop withered from the wrist! . .
Take it away. [*The* GILEADITE *passes through the Gates.*] . . O life of pain! See, see—
This to the shambles, this to sacrifice,
All, all to death, that man by death may live!
What end? What reason? Mystery of the night!
Think of it: dies the body, blooms the grass;
Dies the poor kid, that man may eat and live;
Die father, mother, yielding food to babes
And room to firmer feet; die men in war,
That souls unborn may batten them in peace;

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Death, death for life's sake, everywhere death,
death,
Blood flowing thick as rain! . . O, take my sword,
For never more will I to battle wend,
Or plot man's pain again! . . But lo!—look there!
Comes not one running now?

WATCHMAN (*from above*).

Tidings, O King!
Behold, one comes in utter weariness.

ALL.

'T is a fair sign.

DAVID (*to* BARZILLAI).

Stand by me, aged friend—
Thine arm be vambrace to my heart! I am faint . . .

AHIMAAZ *comes running in.*

Speak, speak, O speak!

AHIMAAZ.

All 's well, my King, all 's well. . .
Water, a little water. [*They give him water.*

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DAVID.

Speak clear truth.
Say, is all well indeed?

AHIMAAZ.

There was much tumult,
And cries of pain, and shouts of victory,
Loud lamentation, hurryings to and fro,
And Joab stood triumphant in the midst.

DAVID.

Knowest no more?

AHIMAAZ.

And is it not enough?

DAVID.

Stand thou aside.

WATCHMAN (*from above*).

Behold another comes,
Struggling for weariness.

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AHIMAAZ.

Him in my path
I passed, outspeeding. Lo, he cometh in!

CUSHI (*running in*).

Tidings, my lord, and peace to Israel!
Amasa to the dust hath bowed his head
Repentant; every sword is in its sheath;
And Joab hither followeth my feet.

DAVID.

O! Absalom?—speak! Absalom?

CUSHI.

Be this
Of Joab sought, to whom thou didst commit
Thy warriors, and the captives, and the slain.

DAVID.

It boots thee little more to mock thy king!

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CUSHI.

O, be the enemies of the King for ever
As Absalom this day!

DAVID.

Ah God, my God! . .
Better that I had dropt in fires of noon,
Sun-smitten ere the spring! Whose deed is this?

CUSHI.

Why should I fear to tell it, seeing truth
Unfoldeth nought more fell than falsehood breeds?
Joab's the deed. For when the rout was warm,
Came one—an Edomite, Mibzar by name—
Deserting, in his treachery and fear,
The breast that fed him. He to Joab knelt,
Crying that he would lead him where his Prince,
Swept from the saddle, tangled in the woods,
Baffled in flight, hung trapt, an easy prey.
Thither he led him, rolling hungry palms,
Elated in expectancy of pelf;
And thither Joab his accursëd feet

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Followed: and with thy blood his hands are wet,

ALL.

Great is this grief, O King: yet lift thine eyes.
Thine enemies, thine enemies are fallen.

DAVID.

Mine enemies!—Though all the Land were burnt
From end to end with fire, rebellion's spawn
Would blacken thick as toads' . . . O God! O God!
All disobedient, faithless, false and fleet
As desert waters maddening weary eyes!
Was not my house enough made desolate,
But he must rob me of my best-beloved? . .
O my lost dead! gone from me, with dark curses
Upon your lips, as though I loved you not!—
Absalom, Tamar, Amnon!—Knew not ye
A father, though he chasten, still may love?
O gone, without forgiveness, gone in anger!
Awake, awake, arise that ye may learn
My heart's long pain for you,—ah, ah mine own,
Learn how I loved you, and through lonely years

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Shall twine your memories drooping in my mind!
Come forth that I may kneel to you, and say
I know that I have wronged you! Come, and still
My care, my fever, my remorseful pain;
Come from your graves, come forth in any guise
From your grim world, and wash away these stains!
O that my hands could rend your tombs, and tear
The heavy earth away, and snap the swathes
That bind you! O that from your dismal sleep
I might uplift you, gently, tenderly,
And wind you in warm raiment, and bend down,
And spread me on your bodies, breast to breast,
And lips to lips, and breathe my weary breath
Into your nostrils, of my blood's warmth lending
Fire to your frozen veins, and cry and cry
My love into your ears, till from their night
Your eyes had opened softly as from slumber,
And ye should kindle to my kiss, and weep
Glad tears, and laugh, forgetting all your griefs!
O, ye shall know it! I will roam the earth
Calling upon your names, till ye shall hear
And answer. Surely it were ill to think

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A man should find not a dear child again,
And heal the casual hurt! Where have ye hid
My darlings from mine eyes? . . Release your prey,
Dread, desperate powers of darkness, ravenous
herd! . .
I would cross over the dark seas, and plain
My love through outer hell, a guest unbidden,
If I might clean my hands of all this blood,
And 'suage your souls. . . What if it be not all,
This sorrowful and meaningless dark life? . .
O, O, that your wronged hearts could clasp a bliss
Larger than love of father or of friend
Beyond the voiceless realms of moon or sun!
O that in fields of other life ye had found
The joys for which ye thirsted, and, at rest,
Smiled on my lonely agonies, as men
Seeing pain cancelled in the perfect end!
O that my sorrows were a thing of nought,
And my grief fooling! O that I could fashion
Your Eden, that from darkness I could move
To meet all, all, where that for which we wrought
Should crown us, and our laughter fill the wind,

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Remembering the old longing and despair,
Secure in the completeness of our love! . .
But what reveals, except a little dust,
Dust within dust, and life all lived in vain? . .

JOAB *approaches.*

Out of my sight! . . What! dost thou smile upon me?
Out of my sight, out of my sight, I say!
O, might those hands burn in eternal fires
Wherewith thou hast shed with *his* mine own heart's blood!

JOAB.

Thy blood! Thy blood's supplanter, the fierce foe
Of thy torn people. Surely loved he well
Thy people, who, forgetting thus thy grief
For Israel's help, this foul rebellion broke
Even by the sacrifice of Absalom!

DAVID.

Hast *thou* rebellion broken?—thou thyself
By this one act before his people's eyes
Flouting the latest mandate of thy King,

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For the King's sorest hurt!—Rebellion's prince
Thou—thou, the first of all my subject bands
To lift a sword against me! Thou it was,
That, spoiling the fair purpose of my youth,
Slewest Abner; and from that revolt hath sprung
Absalom's, holpen of the furtive hand
Of Saul's relentless kindred, else appeased.
Ay, and the fruits that follow who can tell?
Which of thy valiant deeds of old shall now
Ever avail to weigh against thy guilt?
Nay, and whatever shall be, this foul stroke
Goes not unpunished. Hence! and from thy grasp
Gone is thine office. Yea, let Ittai sit,
A stranger, in the seat by thee exalted—
Ay, even Amasa, with a heart as pure
As veins of Ophir, though a traitor proven;
For he, with fair intent, in reason errs,
Thou with deliberate purpose, false and foul!

JOAB.

Pardon, my King! The deed which I have done
Confirms thy kingdom.

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DAVID.

Ha ! for such as thou
Is no forgiveness—none : for in thee lives
Repentance nor remorse, and thy worst deeds,
Self-justifying, in thy sight are pure,
And by thy worst thou holdest to the end.
Therefore my soul in wrath relenteth not.

JOAB.

Nay, then, the wrong be thine, and thine the woe ! [*Goes.*

DAVID.

Back to Jerusalem. Back to your homes.
No home for me !—O, never shall I know
The faces bright with the old loves again !
No more my people as they were, no more
My city !— All is changed ; and step by step
Downward I stagger into the dark void.
[*Moves slowly within the Gates.*

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SCENE II. *Mahanaim. Without the Walls.*

ADONIJAH *and* JOAB.

ADONIJAH.

THY wrong to me is grievous.

JOAB.

O foul, foul!
Ungrateful, treacherous, base, abominable!
Was it for this I followed his wild feet
About the crags of Judah, fought his battles,
Scaled the slant rock of Jebus for his gain,
Forlorn among the arrows of his foes,
Gave all my life to him, gave all my life?

ADONIJAH.

These things thou didst obeying; 't is the deed
Of disobedience and rebellion stirs
This violent wrath. He reasons not amiss.

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JOAB.

I love the People, and I loved the King.
Scant quiet for the People or the King
If the untameable, insatiate soul
Lived on. Small boon his passions to the realm,
Ruling or ruled. Therefore repent I not.
Thou hast the calmer heart, the softer eye.
Look to thy kingdom.

ADONIJAH.

Tempt me not to draw
So soon new trouble on the poor sick Land.
Hereafter we shall wake.

JOAB.

I spur thee not.

ADONIJAH.

'T were jauncing a dull jade.

JOAB.

Yet may there come

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An hour when for the saving of the realm
Thy tenderer soul must rouse itself and dare.

ADONIJAH.

There may. And therefore would I crave thy love,
Joab; and couple to thy stronger will
With iron joints.

JOAB.

Bide thee thy day, I mine.
Now doth the King return in mournful show
Back to Jerusalem. At his right hand
Ride, Adonijah.

ADONIJAH.

So. Hence silently.

[*They go opposite ways.*

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SCENE III. *At the Fords of Jordan, going down from Mahanaim.*

DAVID; BATHSHEBA *and* ATTENDANTS; ADONIJAH; ITHREAM; SHEPHATIAH; BENAIAH; ITTAI; ABISHAI; BARZILLAI; CHIMHAM; JONATHAN; AHIMAAZ; WARRIORS; MANY OF THE PEOPLE.

BARZILLAI.

THUS far, my King. Here to thy hands I yield
Chimham, my son. He, of thy good partaking,
My love to thee will render in fair deeds.

CHIMHAM.

Mine, and my sire's, God aiding me, till death.

DAVID.

Dear for thy sake and his for evermore.
And now, since prayer nor love can draw thee hence,
True friend, farewell: 't were loveless to command.

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BARZILLAI.

My King!

DAVID.

Rebuke me not; I am content,
Knowing it is thy pleasure; knowing well
The pain of unfamiliar eyes, and realms
That bear no memories of youth and dawn,
More keen to aged souls than solitude.
For nought is dear till of our inward lives
Dowered with the dreams, the glamour, overclad
With the mind's fantasy; which not age imparts:
Therefore return now to thine ancient hills,
Rest 'mid the loves, the memories, the suggestions
That clothe their bare heights greenly in thine eyes,
And tenderly and fair as leaves or grass.
Blest be thy name, thy city, and thy sons!

BARZILLAI.

O, blest thy land, thy people, and thy God!

[BARZILLAI *and his* FOLLOWERS *return.*

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SHIMEI *and* BENJAMITES *approach.* SHIMEI *prostrates himself before the* KING.

DAVID.

Arise. From man to man such reverence
Is little meet. What wouldst thou? Up, and say.

SHIMEI.

I am that Shimei, basest of Saul's kin,
Who, with a vain, gross heart and brain awry,
Maddened with hate, reviled thee in thy pain,
Not daring in thy glory to thy face
Even to lift my brows. Thou didst forbear
To slay me: then I knew that I was nought;
Swiftly I shrivelled back upon myself,
A leaf about its worm. When with thy soul
My soul I measured, ah, my self-contempt
Broke me as I am broken! Plant thy foot
Upon my neck.

DAVID.

Arise, and set thyself
On my right hand. Behold ye, now, repentance

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Is stronger than the sceptre of a king.
Forgive thee? As my God hath me forgiven,
Sinning a grosser sin. But thou—alas,
Rebellion is thine inmost heart of life,
Thy very virtue craft!

MEPHIBOSHETH *approaches.*

MEPHIBOSHETH.

I cursed thee not,
O King, for I remembered how thy soul
Clave unto Saul, and unto Jonathan,
My father; and how that strong love—though war
Wasted you, and the doom which set thee highest
Divided—thou thy king, through all thy pain,
Didst quenchless bear: but when this darkness came,
Thoughts dire within me stirred, not soon suppress;
Therefore to-day I bow before thy feet,
While through my heart repentant and my lips
Here speaks my father's spirit—thy lost friend.

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DAVID.

Sore was it, sore to bear, Mephibosheth.
Touch I thy lips? Alas, deceitfulness
Is harder to expel the coward's mind
Than tares the fallow! Yet the land be thine.
Let man be steadfast in his promises,
And loyal to old loves. . .

The CHIEFS OF ISRAEL *and* JUDAH *approach.*

And come *ye* down?
O men of Judah, men of Israel,
Not without cause ye have girt you with this guise
Of sorrow and of shame, not without cause.
The lance that ye have driven in my side
Hath not returned into its rest unwet
With nearer blood; your own is on its blade:
Ay, and the fratricidal strifes and hates
Betwixt you sprung shall die not in a trice
With any sheathing of an errant sword.
They die not. Stronger than the springs of hope,
The dark foreboding, mastering my will,
Rocks me and sways me; and I cannot blink
Knowledge that makes foreknowledge. Now behold

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Your doom that ye have fashioned in your pride!
What glory for a people whom dark hates,
Suspicions, ranklings, whifflings of the will,
Pride of precedence, slidings of belief,
Elation false, false fear, aimless ambition,
For ever lift and level as a sea,
And suffer no repose; who cannot bear
Even for an hour the strong and stable arm
In governance, though guideless weak as babes;
Choose kings, and in the itch of idle dreams
Revolt, set up, cast down, nor know their needs?
Ruin for them, disruption, littleness,
Self-slaying wars; until the mightiest foe,
Breaking them tribe by tribe, enslave, eject,
And dash them like blown spray about the world.
And, though with what remains of vigour here
I strive for thee, O stubborn race—I, David,
Who, labouring long, in pain, and prayer, and love
Lavished all thankless, drew thy scattered bands
Together, bound my love about their hearts,
And held them by the sinews of mine arms—
Here is thy woeful chronicle of defeats

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Begun, and pictured in a little day
Thy struggle and thy failure and thy fall!
Yet I forsake thee not, O Israel,
Nor grudge my life's last throb to stay thy doom!
The fire of sorrow, humiliation, pain,
Purges the dross of the proud heart away.
Friends, the great woe and fever of the realm
Hath left us changed. No, never yet hath man
Come from the furnaces of grief unchanged.
And I . . O, judge me gently, if mine arm
Not all its might retains! The rolling suns
And gathering seasons, suck the sap of youth,
And all that keeps men valiant. I have known
More than the summer's heat, the winter's cold,
Tempest, and frost, and drouth, and rain, and hail.
O life, long rapturous as when I, a child,
Swung from the gnarled olives' leafy chains
Out in clear air, singing for joy—now pain!
The waters have gone over me, the fires
Have scorched me, the sword rankled in my breast.
Yea, as the meadows when the floods are gone,
So is my soul: the wild things of the jungle

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Have sought their prey, and fought, and slain upon
it—
The leopard and the jackal and the bear,
The lion and the wild-boar and the lynx,
The jerboa and the marmot: lo, the trails,
And tracks, and prints, and fewmets, like a net,
Showing what hath been here! Now, therefore, friends,
My People, O my People, ask me not
For the renewal of a dead sweet year!
The battle-arm is broken: let it fall.
For me, with heart o'erthrown, a fairer toil,
Not lighter: to repair a ruined realm,
To satisfy the unforgotten dead,
To salve the wounds agape in riven hearts,
To reëngraft the alienated lives,
And the imperial crown of Peace reveal—
Hard, hopeless toil for weary baffled hands!
What triumph? Yea, for though ye bear me back
With sounds of cymbal, shawm, and lute, and harp,
And though ye shout hosannahs to your king,
And spread your garments under my faint feet,
I but return in mockery, to die. [*All move upward.*

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ACT V.

SCENE I. *Zelah of Benjamin. Before the Tomb of* KISH.

Many BENJAMITES *assembled.* LABOURERS *resting.* JONADAB, *habited as a Merchant, stops in passing.*

JONADAB.

YE men of Benjamin, what build ye here?
What solemn preparation draws you down
From every hillside village, every field,
Thronging the olive-shades of this fair vale?

BENJAMITE CHIEF.

Friend, thou hast come from far and lonely lands,
Else hadst thou little need to ask of this.

JONADAB.

From far lands have I come, and lonely ways,

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Didst thou but know, good friend; for since the hour
With Amnon's death came storm upon the Land—
So long ago, so many a year ago—
I have not sipt the wells of Israel,
Or kissed familiar brows. Forgive me, then,
If ignorantly I ask thee of this thing.

BENJAMITE CHIEF.

Thrice welcome to this strange solemnity!
Seest thou the clean and open sepulchre
The labourers make yawn against the sun?
It is the grave of Kish, and here we lay
This hour the ashes of our great king dead:
Here Saul and Jonathan, whom death not sundered,
In death shall sleep together to the end.
'T is therefore all the hills have poured us down,
Even as they shed their fountains to the vale;
And here in little time King David—old,
And from his couch of sickness lifted—comes
To make this royal glorious burial.
Tarry awhile, and witness the event.

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JONADAB.

Strange and sweet words. But tell me why so late,
And why at all, King David thus hath roused
From its deep sleep the long-unhonoured dust?

BENJAMITE CHIEF.

Sit by me, weary wanderer, in the cool,
And, till the King comes down, I will essay
This story to uncoil. When the First King,
The wild dark soul, upon Gilboa fell,
And by him Jonathan, and Israel's hope
Of wide imperial glory with them waned,
The Philistines, exulting in their fall,
Drew thence their bodies, and on Bethshan walls
Hung them in mockery. Then, learning this,
The loyal men of Jabesh on a night
Arose, and in the darkness hewed them down;
Bore them for love to Jabesh, and there burnt them,
And after buried what was left—poor dust—
Under a tree. Now, late it came to pass
That a great famine fell upon the Land.

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The King, entreating Javeh, from the mouth
Of prophets heard proclaimed that for a sin
Of Saul against the Gibeonites, the curse
Had fallen on the People—for King Saul
In his wild hour had turned on them the sword—
And on his seed should be avenged their pain.
Then was the word fulfilled that Rizpeh's sons
And Michal's (whom she bare to Adriel,)
Should suffer death. But when the seven were
slain,
The aged Rizpeh, all her motherhood
Maddened within her, strewed upon the rocks
Her lifeless bodies, nursed them night and noon,
Scared the fierce ravens hovering over them,
And ate nor drank through all her vigilant hours.
Then, hearing how the aged mother mourned—
She with whose young dark hair the hand of Saul
Had played in lusty summers of his prime—
In David woke the strong sweet boyhood love
Wherewith he loved his king and Jonathan;
And unto Jabesh sent he for their bones,
To bury them in honour here to-day.

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JONADAB.

Friend, it is wisely done. But while we talk,
Lo, the King cometh! O, how white that head!
Bowed the strong body! Sad, sad, sad to me!

DAVID *enters, leaning upon* SOLOMON; *followed by* ADONIJAH; GAD; ABIATHAR; JOAB; SHEPHATIAH; ITHREAM; BENAIAH; *and a great* MULTITUDE of the PEOPLE.

BENJAMITE CHIEF.

Behold the youth, the little Solomon—
Bathsheba's son—on whom he rests his hand!
'T is said the sceptre passes to his palms.

JONADAB.

Ah, dream ye so? It is a fair young face—
Gentle and wise—and my soul yearns to him.

BENJAMITE CHIEF.

Nathan hath been his guardian. In the King
His love but salves the wounds his brethren sear—
Spring blossom blown in autumn! It is well . . .
Alert, alert: keep silent: lo, the King!

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DAVID (*advancing slowly*).

Is this indeed the place?

NATHAN.

Truly, O King.

DAVID.

Then, lay we here the royal valiant dust.

[*The Bones of* SAUL *and* JONATHAN *are laid in the Tomb.*

Royal they were and valiant, strong and fair,
Loving they were and gentle in their strength—
Saul, Jonathan! . . O Israel, for thy weal,
Against dark doom they strove!—stupendous war!
One staggered blind in madness to his grave,
One, bent with the world's sorrow, bowed his head
Low as the winter-laden pines. They strove;
They perished ere they triumphed; yet have laid
The rock whereon the vast foundations rest
Of all thou shalt accomplish and attain. . .
Magnificent in failure, gods, not men,
Let Earth remember these! . . [*Abstractedly*] Failed!
Thou hast failed;

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And I have failed, who stumble to my tomb
Unwashed from slaughter, nor the peaceful fruits
And harvest of my bloody fields have found.
Ay, and what boots it that mine arm was stretched
Across foes fallen, and my name hath been
A thunder in the stricken ears of men?
The red seed strewn upon a thousand fields
Gives death for increase; fertile discontent,
Brute-mother, suckling sins at every dug;
Rebellion; strife of brethren; and the hand
Of childhood lifted to the father's throat.
Peace hath not grown of war, but wars of peace:
All gentle arts, which like an husbandman
I nurtured, shrink in fierce misfortune's beams;
And blasts of ruin, louder than that storm
Which hurled my soul in arms against thy life,
Beat on my hoar head bowed in equal sin—
Equal, for I against the Law rebelled,
And worked a coward's deed; not in my sin
Sublimely daring, nor with reason maimed,
As thou, but meanly moving in mean ways
For selfish glut against a puny foe,

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Self-blinding. Happier; for to me was given
Time to repent. Poor hath repentance been.
And what avails? Nor time nor toil annul
The immeasurable hurt of my deeds born.
O dragging burthen of old sin! Dark brood
Of memories re-risen from the void!
This heavy-laden brain! . . . Saul, Saul, thy face
Vexes me, and thine eyes are hard to bear! . .
The earth fails from me, the light dwindles—help!
Gone! . . . In what eddying world of fantasies
Move I? . . Ah child, take, take me to my home!

SOLOMON.

My father!

GAD (*to the* PEOPLE).

Friends, I pray you, make no sign,
But suffer us to pass in silence through.

[*All disperse silently, except* ADONIJAH, JOAB, *and* ABIATHAR, *who linger a little behind.*

JOAB (*to* ADONIJAH).

Art thou awake?

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ADONIJAH.

I have not seen in vain.

JOAB.

Mark me, the hour draws nigh. Strike swift, or fail.

ADONIJAH.

Yea, if it must be; for this mimic death
Foreshows the end.

JOAB.

And lo, his dying hand

JONADAB *reënters, and pauses, unperceived.*

Already on the brows of Solomon!

ADONIJAH.

Abiathar.

ABIATHAR.

My lord?

ADONIJAH.

Thou too hast seen?

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ABIATHAR.

Amnon is dead, and Absalom is dead.
Thou art the eldest left. Look to thy throne.

ADONIJAH.

'T is well. It shall be now. Each to his way.

[*They disperse.*

JONADAB.

Thus, thus, thus. Now shall I rebellion scotch.
I will unto the King, and, pardon begged,
Their words reveal. One simple duty done
Would dance a diamond on this Æthiop hand.

[*Goes.*

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SCENE II. *On the way from Ramah to Jerusalem.*

NATHAN.

SHALL the frail branches of this royal tree
Not snap amid its fall? . . . Spread wide Thy hands,
O Javeh, and sustain the mighty soul
But for one hour! O, when the ruin comes,
Long imminent, all Israel will upheave,
Rebellion fierce as flame in crackling roofs
Will spit against the heaven, old hates take heart,
And dark revenge uncloak its armed hand;
The vanquished peoples, like a languid fire
Catching the wind, will roar the realm's surcease;
And war, flush-fronted, red as Sodom cliffs,
Before the appalled ruler stand to dare.
Avert it, Lord! Already Joab's brows

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Blacken toward Solomon with gathering wrath,
And Adonijah, puffed with royal dreams,
Takes on the pomp of kings. O, with Thine arm
Shatter their might, and let the best prevail!

[*Passes.*

SCENE III. *Jerusalem. A Room in the* KING'S *Palace.*

DAVID, BATHSHEBA, SOLOMON, ZADOK, BENAIAH, JONADAB.

DAVID.

FAINT am I, and the voices of the world
Like whispers seem, and all things like a dream.
O Bathsheba, upon thy neck my head
Bear steadfast while I speak! and thou, my son—
Loving and tender, wise and bold, dear child

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Of perfect love, a nature perfect through—
Hold thou my hand; for all the stable earth
Fleeteth from me away . . .

NATHAN *enters.*

O, welcome, welcome!
O, blessed be the God of Israel
Who led thee here this hour!

NATHAN.

All is well now.

DAVID.

Nathan, Zadok, Benaiah—faithful three—
Thou with God's glory on thy face, whose ears
For spiritual sounds than eagle-eyes
For seeing, keener are; and thou, calm, brave,
Gentle, obedient, loyal—soldier true—
Benaiah, of my warriors, latest tried,
Sound soldier-metal, sure as tempered steel;
And thou God's silent minister—O, hear!
Scant breath is mine for words, scant strength to hold
The thought that flies along the darkened brain,

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Goes and returns not, flashes like a dream
Caught on up-fluttering wing and held in flight
Before the startled senses snatched from sleep,
A moment only—then a blank, a blank.
Since the dark hour when Amnon fell, my sons
One after one, my tenderest purest loves
Rending, to make more terrible my doom,
Have lifted up impatient rebel hands:
Not one is faithful. When my heart forefelt
That this should be, ah wife, ah true, true wife,
Did not I swear the child of thy dear love
Should sit where I have sat, and lead my people,
God helping, to the bourn that fled my feet?
Lo, now, the spirit of Adonijah stirs
The leaflets and the branches of the realm,
Heralding tempest; and my days are few.
There is not one of these fit to be king.
Now, therefore, take my youngest, Solomon,
And set him on my mule, and bring him down
To Gihon; there anoint him, in my seat,
King over Judah, King of Israel,
That I may see his kingdom ere I die.

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BATHSHEBA.

O, blessed be thy name, above all kings
All-glorious, who hast made me among women
Blessed for ever!

NATHAN.

Blessed be thy name!
Blessed the merciful and tender God
Who thus hath given thee strength the good to
choose!

SOLOMON.

My father, lay thy hands upon my brows.

DAVID.

Ah child, thy mother's tranquil eyes are thine,
The wise, the sweet, the quiet smile is thine;
Not without frolic as of youngling lambs
Hurtless, and silvery laughters, humour kind—
The salt of human souls; and deep deep love:
Nor of the best that with thy father's life
Was woven dost thou lack, lacking the base;

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Nor that strange thirst of beauty, strength, and good,
That made one wasting sickness of my days.
May God in love make beautiful thy deeds!
Tarry not: for it may be that these lips
May greet you not with sound till that your hands
Shall do is done, and, far, in other fields
We labour where all labour is as rest.
(*To* BATHSHEBA.) Lead me, thou, therefore, dearest,
to my death.
(*To the Others.*) Go, taking no farewells: the worst
is sleep,
And on the morrow we shall wake, and know.

[BATHSHEBA *leads the* KING *forth.*

SOLOMON.

My father and my mother! . . Out, alas! . .
O sirs, the splendour of this gift, this power
Shed thus upon my young unripened soul,
Elates me not, but humbles and subdues.
For though, when oft my mother, with sad eyes
Bending above me, both to soothe her pain
And make me man at heart with manly hope,

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Foretold the dawning of this strange sad day,
I trembled with a great excess of joy
And feverous expectation; and the name
Of king was sweet as are the apricots,
And cooler on the lips; yet is the real,
Or ill or good, oft easier to bear
Than the like good or evil visionary;
And seldom seems it—if I err not, sirs—
That pleasant fortune doth our lives befall
Except with pain companioning, or swift
Following—death, or change—I know not what;
And ah, sirs, sirs, this failing of the King,
And shadow of death's palms upon his brow,
And the loud mutter of rebellion rolled
About his dying ears, paternal wrongs,
And wrenching of a heart how worn with pain!
And, then the thought that I, the youngest born,
Inherit that for which my brethren pine:
These are enough to winter such an hour;
They fill me with a grief ye shall not know.
But more, I was not born a child of mirth,
But nursed in sorrow; and my mates have been

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My mother, wise and mournful, and the King,
Wisest and mournfullest in Israel,
And ye, the white-haired patriarchs of the Land.
A child's delusions never have been mine,
Not mine, then, a child's gladness at a boon
Which lays on me a shadow and a loss,
And all the sustenance of the drooping Tribes.
Therefore, if any fears be in your hearts,
Born of my youth, I pray you, banish them.
The deeds of all the years of mightiest men
Are but the dreams of boyhood framed in form.
I boast not of the works that I would do,
And visions that have gladdened half my youth;
But not without a purpose here this day
I follow at the bidding of the King,
For Israel's help. Let this the years unfold.

NATHAN.

I chose thee, I have watched thee, I have known;
Scant fears have I. Lo, wast thou not indeed
Even as my son? Ah, thou hast clung to me
Warm, warm, with childlike pressure of the limbs,

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And thrustings of thy smooth and dimpled
cheek
Against my beard, and sealure of the lips
Times upon times; and plucked me by the robe
To draw me to some wonder thou hadst found,
How oft, in flower or pebble of the walks,
In garden or in field! and cried for names
Of things unnamed, and causes all unknown,
Gazing upon the waters or the stars;
And, later, hast thou not with questionings
Of the mind's essence, life, and death, the world
Viewless, and God amid His works concealed,
Brought back the sadness of the baffled soul
Lulled in content with ignorance, hard won?
But alway hast thou shown the loving heart,
And gentle ways preservative and kind,
Not hurting bird, or fly, or leaf, or worm,
Or soul of living man; a mind to thought
As sensitive as the nail's quick to pain;
Nor sudden in thy deeds, or in thy wrath;
But weighing well justice and consequence.
Therefore I hold thee of thy father's kith

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Aptest for rule. God's seal is on thy brows.
Arise, then, fearless, and His hest obey.

BENAIAH.

We trust thee, lord? See, I am but a soldier,
And look but as a soldier at the world,
And judge men by their thews and hardihood;
All else to my poor brain is giddiness
And falling from the brink: I say, Arise,
And lead. There 's mastery in thy voice and brows.
Lo, here is one that serving shall not fail.

JONADAB.

O, make me but the least of all thy slaves,
That I may learn what 't is to love the good!

ZADOK.

The strength of God is with thee—the sweet love
Of right and truth, sure guide unto the soul
That errs in judgment, back to virtue's road.
And all thy servants love thee: this is well:
The love of poor men testifieth much
In children. Fit art thou poor men to rule.

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SOLOMON.

O sirs, this gentleness and strong sweet love
Break all my pride and bend me to the ground.
I will the King and these your hests obey.
Let the long labour of my years begin.

[*They go.*

SCENE IV. *En-rogel.*

ADONIJAH, ABIATHAR, JOAB, SHEPHATIAH, ITHREAM, *and* MANY OF THE PEOPLE.

ADONIJAH.

FRIENDS, since on me your choice indeed has fallen,
I dare the utmost; nor with dubious heart,
But conscience-armèd resolution,
And spirits light as air. For though, in truth,
I am not pacted of those restless parts
That make men rebels, rather knit to peace
And gentle ways, yet duty and your love
Impel me to this venture—which, I pray you,

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Call not rebellion, but the enforced attempt
Of justice to assert her sovereignty:
The which in truth it is. The King I love,
Yet more I love the Kingdom. Shall I brook
The Kingdom's hurt, and in the King's decay
Its falling likewise mourn? That were not well,
Or worthy of the royal blood that beats
Hence towards the suffering people of this realm.
And shall I, rightful leader, rightful king,
And with your honours wreathed about my brow,
Permit the bastard younger to usurp
The realm, and thus dishonour your fair lives?
Not so. However loath, I lift mine arms
Thus at your bidding, and proclaim swift war
Against all else that shall dispute my sway.

ABIATHAR.

God prosper this thy righteous brave intent!
When David warred upon the rebel Saul,
I at his right hand stood. No little thing
Would set me thus to-day against my lord;
Yet turn I with a cheerful heart aloof,

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And for the good and safety of the Land
Mine old affections slay.

ADONIJAH.

Ah, bravely said!
And thou shalt be requited. And all ye,
Who at the beck of duty follow us,
Ye shall not miss reward. And look you, friends:
There is no wrong that shall not be redressed,
No heavy burthen but shall lightened be.

ISRAELITES.

Hail, Adonijah! Hail our rightful King!

JOAB.

Forbear. Your voices cannot lift him king,
But those now idle arms. Give *me* your hands,
And I will put such weapons in their grasp
That ye shall hail him king, and king indeed.

ISRAELITES.

Lo, they are thine!

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JOAB.

For use: and stint acclaim.

ADONIJAH.

See the right arm of David turned against him!

ITHREAM.

Thy cause is ours, thy wrong is ours, thy hope
Is ours.

SHEPHATIAH.

Commend us to the battle's worst,
And we will venture, hungering at the heart.

ADONIJAH.

Thanks, brothers; thanks, brave soldiers; thanks
to all!
Be wary, yet be hopeful. Move we now!

[*They march forward.*

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SCENE V. *Jerusalem. Within the* KING'S *Palace. The* KING'S *Bedchamber.*

DAVID, *lying upon his couch;* BATHSHEBA.

DAVID.

HEART of my heart, life with my life in love
So folded that I scarce can deem our souls
Through separate senses feel the winds and sun,
How can this body's death fray out the woof
Of soul with soul and life with life inwoven,
Or still the common pulse—not thine, or mine,
But mutual—of passion interfused?
Shalt thou not die with me, or I with thee
Live on, invisible to the bodily sense,
But to the inner quick more palpable
Than thought, as near the mind as are these eyes? . .
Why dost thou weep? Alas, thy tears are foes,
And reasoners against my hope, my yearning,

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Showing we scarce are one, but isolate!
O, if thou hast a doubt, declare, nor fear!

BATHSHEBA.

None have I. Death? The sweetest, gentlest sleep
Unto the dead, scare but to living souls!
I would that I might lay my aching brows
Here on thy pillow, fold my hand in thine,
And drift with thee out on the unknown seas.
It is the *shadow* of Death createth fear,
Himself as kind as love. Fear? I have none.

DAVID.

The latter love hath been so sweet, so calm!
All the heart's fevers over, jealousies
That mocked the reason and the resolute will,
The dread of alienation, vague distrust
Bred of imagination, in the seat
Of knowledge not yet planted rightful king!
I found thee surer in thy moods and ways
Than Spring's return, the blossoms and the leaves;
No wish forgotten, mutest prayer of eye
Or hand or brow unheeded, no deceit,

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No promise ever broke, suspicions none;
Such faith as but in perfect woman breathes
And man subdues to godlike tenderness.
So hast thou holpen me to bear my fall,
And o'er my holiest dreams uplifted me.
Ah, what had lent such love in prosperous youth!
What had I been and how my people thriven
If sinless we had loved from sinless dawn!..
Think not I fear this change. The worst is well.
Death is not life's completion; nothing here
Attains its fair potential perfectness;
Neither the flower, rain-spattered, nor the tree,
Crookt with the frequent blast; nor birds, with plumes
Broken and stained; nor lion in his field;
Nor outer form of man, nor inward soul.
This grand, this fair, this awful universe
Seems but the block of a vast work half-hewn,
Faint simular of thought immeasurable,
A dream dim-figured in substantial form.
Shall we the strong, inscrutable, wise God
Accuse of folly, waste, or wantonness?

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Doubt not the visible fabric of this world
Is not the first or last or only deed
Abiding of His sleepless operant hand.
And if another fairer, sweeter is
Or shall be, think you that the spirit of man,
The very flower of things, the fairest shown
Of all His labouring, likest His own soul,
In love, in flight of vision, sensual range,
And mind and hand creative, evermore
Joint labourer in the fashioning of the earth,
By Him impelled, by Him with substances
Malleable and plastic palm supplied—
The free, the bold, the daring spirit of man—
Shall but be squandered, nor in richer fields
Sweet space and wide for toil diviner own,
The boon for which to thirst He framed it here?

BATHSHEBA.

No, for the holiest passion of the soul
Is armed against the thought—love, the sweet vine
That lifts its tendrils upward, like a babe
Its feeble arm for help, and finds no rock

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Or tree, or staff supportant, and so curls
Back on itself, and withering, drops to dust.
If the pure longings thus be spent in vain,
Better Earth's womb were blasted ere it bore
A race so cheated, marred, and miserable.

DAVID.

Behold, death is not! Things created once
Change and divide, but cease not though they change.
I know not through what mystic shift of things
Mine habitation hence shall be removed:
Yet I believe, this mask of clay—all-good,
All-wonderful, yet heavy and obscure—
Fading, the Spirit—that which talks with thee
And feels this body, sense within the sense—
Shall somewhere in a richer realm emerge
Identical, all whole within itself,
Take viewless wings at ankle for the winds,
Oars for the deep, the powers and faculties
With which dreams do endow us; with new sense,
Largelier feeling that which here we feel,

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Or feeling with the spiritual quick
A universe of spiritual thoughts—
Keen joy to powers in joy unweariable;
Where man shall need not Reason, but shall know.
For, boast we howsoever loud in pride,
(Poor purblind wanderers, fumbling through the mist!)
Reason is but the tool of finite things,
The very witness of our feebleness,
By which we grope and puzzle toward the Truth,
The Light, the Sweet God *sees* and angels see,
And find but dimness, if we find at all.
There shall I fashion fairer shapes, untired,
Than ever baffled me and beat me down
In failure impotent; and there shall I
Nearer my God abide, and breathe as flowers
That kiss the sun with perfume; there shall love,
Free of the fleshly longing, live for all—
None grudging, and none stinting, none forlorn;
And there shall I recover my lost dead,
And know myself forgiven—peace, all peace! . .
Yet ah, the thought of thy long loneliness!

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BATHSHEBA.

Mourn not for me: all shall be well with me
Now, for my sorrows are no more, my pain
Ends with thy sorrow's ending. I shall triumph
Now in thy spirit's fair majestic deeds.
I, who, or e'er the flower of womanhood's
Unfolding, in my still and lonely hours,
Whether my hands upon the distaff droopt,
Or on the wheel my foot unwitting paused,
Followed thee in thy kingly toil below—
Thou god of all my years!—ay, when the battle
Rolled unto Lebanon, or far away
Beyond the rims of Moab, or thy mind
Moulded its dream of city or of tower,
Or shaped thy growing kingdom, all day long
Dwelt with thee, saw thee, heard thee, and adored—
Shall I in these thy glories not rejoice,
Forgetting that I dream indeed alone,
Here in these empty chambers desolate?
Nay. And the road of death now sweet will seem,
Familiar, trodden by thy herald feet,

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And I shall long to tempt it, and to see
The beautiful new mountains of thy lands.

VOICES (*without*).

We are for Adonijah. Is not he
The firstborn of the remnant of his sons?

DAVID.

Ah, ah, what sounds are those? . . Call out my
spears! . .
What, is there none to help in this last hour,
And must I die with not one hope fulfilled?
O, where is Nathan, where Benaiah? Why
This dallying? Wherefore have they mocked me thus,
And thus my son betrayed? O, O!

BATHSHEBA.

They come
Soon. Let this deed not trouble thee, dear soul:
'T is but the fume of fools.

DAVID.

What sayest thou? . .

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Hold my hand, darling, lest I drift away . . .
Why, thou art gone! . . thou too! . . not so, not so.
Thou never wast forgetful. Draw the doors
Wide for the light! . . Let me have air, sweet air!
Thanks, thanks, mine own!

BATHSHEBA.

Look up, look out, for joy!
See all the heavens afire about the sun,
As he goes down in splendour to his rest!

DAVID.

He took me from the sheepcotes, and he blest me,
Bending his great sad eyes upon my face—
My King! . . What, were ye angered? Look you, now!
Have I not done the utmost man hath dared?
Which of you all would dare what I have *done?*

BATHSHEBA.

I am beside thee ever. Speak to *me.*

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DAVID.

My People, O my People! . . Was it not
Hard that my love should pass for nothingness? . .
If, in oblivion or the zeal of sway,
Too near and heavy might my yoke have pressed,
Yet even now I suffer for your sakes!

BATHSHEBA.

Alack! what seeks he thus, about the room,
Like one gone blind, rolling his beamless orbs?

DAVID.

When eventime hath come, then to the troughs . . .
I do not love to see my little lambs
Grow to the sober heavy-coated sheep,
Or watch the horns turn backward on my kids . . .
What sayest thou, dear friend of my sad soul?
Go back, go back unto thy father's house,
And tempt not death for me, for dear love's help!

BATHSHEBA.

Ah, the sad hopeless movements of the hands!
But lo, the smile that steals into his eyes!

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DAVID.

Bring violets, and myrtles, and the rose
Bunching the trailer from the seaward crag;
Gather them in the dew, to wreathe her brows—
My darling—and the water-lily buds,
With white cold faces pillowed on their leaves.

BATHSHEBA.

O, O that they were come! . . . What wouldst thou? Say!

DAVID.

Ah, thou art near me, darling! Have I slept?
O, I have seen and known a world of things,—
The notes of nightingales in thickets warm,
And scents from fields my childish feet have pressed,
Strange rebel voices muttering at the doors,
And faces hot with battle and with blood,
Old foemen's faces flashing through the dust,
And sweet green light as of the budding woods,
The joy of springtime, and the youngling leaves,
And flowers, and couching calves amid the meads;

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Strange, sad, but mostly sweet . . What said I? . .
ah,
It is all fading out of reach once more! [*Sleeps.*

BATHSHEBA.

O that his pangs were over, and this sleep
Might be the end indeed! Rather I would
That never his great eyes would open up,
Grieving, to find my face in all this gloom,
Never again his lips be stirred for speech,
Than I should see this feebleness and pain.
But, O, not yet, O gracious God, not yet
The strange and dread cessation! Stay the life,
O Father, in the poor, thin, shrunken breast
A little while, till he shall hear and know
Solomon reigneth King of Israel!
O, hasten, Lord, the coming of their feet! . .
Why do they tarry? Wherefore this delay? . .
Love thee? . . Alack, that hands so often stretched
In worship, stronger now than thine should move,
And thou, the mightiest soul of all the Tribes,
Lie here more helpless than a nursling babe!

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Ah God! I will forget his faded eyes,
And think of him as in his lustrous youth,
When he would ride forth from the city-gates,
With all his hosts around him, giant men,
Yet by him dim as stars about the sun—
The whole light his, bright over all the Land!
Back to the old delicious days I drift,
And nothing is that is not glad and fair.
So rest I dreaming, holding thus his hand . . .
But there! hark there!—is it not they?

VOICES (*without*).

All hail,
The young, the fair, the virtuous—Prince of Peace!

BATHSHEBA.

Ah, ah! wake, David, wake! O joy, O joy!
Hearest thou now their voices, come at last?

VOICES (*without*).

Blessed the name of David and thy name!

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DAVID.

Lift me up, lift me, that my soul may hear.

VOICES (*without*).

Now glory to thee, King of Israel!
Saul's, David's might be thine, and not their griefs!
Stand forth, O Solomon, so young, so pure!
With thee, by hope uplifted, we arise,
And with glad heart once more our task renew.

BATHSHEBA.

Thy father's soul be with thee, child, my child!

DAVID.

Ah, sweet, sweet, sweet! . . Ay, darling—lightly—
so! . .
It is well ended. . . Thus . . . upon thy breast!

END OF PART II. OF THE TRAGEDY OF ISRAEL.

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Opinions of the Press.

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sitional age or stage. But he does not lose heart or hope. His hope, indeed, is not always sure and certain, but it is always deep-rooted and clinging. The opening section of 'De Verdun of Darragh,' though in it the author does not speak in his own person, may with safety be set down as the utterance of his personal thoughts. It is a lofty and impassioned defence of the reasonableness of those eternal hopes which the soul needs and will not let go. . . . Hardly any one who is weighed down by the burden of the age's problems could read this section, practically an independent whole, and other similar poems and passages in Mr. Armstrong's book, without feeling braced and cheered."—*Spectator.*

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"Let haste be made at once to express the most cordial agreement with the opinions enunciated melodiously in 'An Invocation,' and to assure the writer that the mountain-muse, with her waving hair and venturous mien and tameless woodland ways, with her wild-wood flowers and garlands green, with sounds of stream and tree, with 'clearness of the mountain air and fragrance of the sea,' is certainly far more likely to 'assuage the deeper want than seas of sensual art.' . . . In the mountain it is you must seek her, and to the mountain, after she has descended and exchanged sweet whispers with you, and breathed her inspiration into you, depend upon it she will ascend again. So at least,

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any muse that respects herself will be sure to do; and so she will preserve her freshness, her vigour, her buoyancy. To this fact the author's own productions bear ample witness, whether he be telling a long romantic eventful tale, in four parts and in many varieties of lyric verse, or exhibiting his dashing powers of description, as in the piece entitled 'The Glen of the Horse,' or in the spirited lay of the flood and of the maiden rescued from death, or in the two parts of 'Luggalà,' or in other poems long or short."—*Illustrated London News.*

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"Mr. Armstrong is a genuine poet. His sympathies with nature are strong, and his love for his Wicklow home intense. His opening invocation breathes all the freshness and loveliness of Wicklow scenery. The stories are always interesting, and for the most part of a very healthy tone."—*Tablet.*

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passionate vividness and with such expressive music, that they take us captive at once, hold us in their spell, and will not let us go until the conclusion has been reached. Mr. Armstrong is a master of varied versification. . . . He is always strong, sinewy, and virile. His handling of character and incident is admirable, and the book has therefore not only an artistic but a strong human interest, the very thing which is so markedly missing in so much of the poetry of the period."—*Manchester Examiner.*

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'Let me take a chair
And sit with idle gentlemen, and stare.'

The book consists of his reflections as he gazes on the brilliant scene—

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gotten. . . . But though the Poet is a satirist, he is no pessimist. He does not laugh like the Mephistopheles which the imagination of Goethe conceived. The deep and thoughtful student of objective nature, the observer of those actual phenomena of reflection which inspire his earlier poems, has grown cynic. He must not be misunderstood. The satirist may wound many susceptibilities, but in the healthiest exercise of his mind he is but cruel to be kind. This is the disposition of Mr. Armstrong, and the very peculiarities of the poem which he has now put before the public will serve only to exhibit the generosity and versatility of an ability which his countrymen respect and admire."—*Irish Times.*

"Satire is a new departure for Mr. Armstrong, and he travels the road with as light and sure a step as he did in his lyrical and romantic and dramatic excursions. We fancy, indeed, that there is in this poem a note of self-reliance that is not discernible in his previous works. This self-reliance must, of course, be assumed by a satirist, for all laughter at the faults of others implies, as old Hobbes said, a sense of superiority on the part of the laugher; but we are happy to think that in Mr. Armstrong's case, it proceeds from a recognition of the fact that his novitiate is over, and his position in English poetry securely fixed. . . . English satire is a difficult species of composition. Those who have succeeded in it may be counted on the fingers of one hand—Dryden, Pope, Johnson, Byron in his 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.' Bulwer essayed it in 'The New Timon,' and did not greatly succeed in it. We expect a better future for 'Mephistopheles in Broadcloth.'"—*Dublin Evening Mail.*

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'Mephistopheles in Broadcloth' is a very clever satire in which the follies and rogueries of politics and literature, the Church and the Bar, the Press and the Stage, are dealt with unsparingly."—*Cork Constitution.*

[*Translation.*] "The poet G. F. Armstrong has just published a work, 'Mephistopheles in Broadcloth,' in which a modern Mephisto, suiting our time, in a fashionable cloth coat, has taken his place on one of the hired chairs in Rotten Row, the elegant promenade in Hyde Park, where the grand and fashionable world passes before him, and where he is intent on giving everyone a hit. The situation is certainly well-chosen for a satirist. . . . His remarks about the Church are in many respects particularly correct and amusing, as for example the enumeration of the different sects, and again the different views within these sects. He mentions two dozen of these by name, and has not by any means exhausted their number. Meanwhile some prominent personages pass his garden-chair, in this or that manner ;—judges and poets, lawyers and high prelates, all intermixed in a motley way, must serve as a target for his arrows, and at the same time as mortar to keep the single bricks together. . . . The section on the English stage is particularly noteworthy. . . . He throws out strikingly the difference between the present state of the stage and that of the drama in saying—

'Ay, all but set the Stage o'er Mother Church,
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life abounding in happiness and hope, with seasons of gloom and sore disturbance; abounding in loves and admirations—love and admiration of nature, love and admiration of books, and other and still more passionate loves and admirations; full of reflection and emotion; giving out at one time

'Hyblæan murmurs of poetic thought,
Industrious in its joy;'

giving birth at another to battles of the spiritual instincts with their intellectual persecutors and destroyers; and passing through all forms and phases of belief, unbelief, disbelief, and misbelief, though happily finding its way at last to faith and peace. . . . In the biographies of these times the merit of all merits which is rarest is 'the tender grace of not too much.' To this merit, as well as many others, the biography of Edmund Armstrong may fairly lay claim. . . . His life was a poem."—*Edinburgh Review.*

"His life had in it material enough for two lives of the same length—frolics of boyhood, the growth of a passion for external nature, ardent friendship, an unsatisfied love, the loss and restoration of a faith, authorship in prose and verse, all these filled to the full the narrow count of his years. . . . The editor has done his work well, with all reverence and love for his dead brother, and with many lively and tender touches of his own."—*Academy.*

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"Armstrong had a varied, turbulent soul-life within himself, and he could truly be ranked with those among whom Georges Sand's happy remark finds application, 'Il y a des gens qui vivent beaucoup à la fois et dont les ans comptent double.' . . . By the adoption of many of the charming original letters of the deceased, George Armstrong has, as far as the construction was possible, fashioned an autobiography out of a biography; and by this means he has attained his object, to give the reader a vital picture of the poet. We fancy that we see before us the highly-gifted youth, to whom in an unusual measure it was given to awaken interest and sympathy, and make himself the centre of a circle of loving friends. His joyous inspiration works contagiously through his vivacity, and his nimble, merry fancy brings us in a moment from tears to laughter; while on the other hand the daring with which his youthful spirit plunged into the darkest depths of the human soul, and the fortitude with which he bore severe bodily suffering, fill us with true reverence."—*Magazin für die Literatur des Auslandes.*

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